ORDINARY IN THE UNORDINARY LESSONS ON RESILIENCE AND HOPE-A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH WELL-BEING AND LEARNING DURING COVID-19

by

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Abstract

Emergency remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic had an array of implications for youth and their families. This qualitative case study explored youth experiences and their parents' perceptions about youth mental health and learning during imposed emergency remote instruction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a multi-informant and semi-longitudinal case study research design, the purpose of the study was to describe the resilience processes related to navigating remote learning at two different points in time (May 2020 and May 2021). Participants included four youth aged 12-17 years old and their four parents that totaled 16 separate semi-structured interviews. The findings include rich descriptions about the in-depth experiences of youth and their families navigating the uncharted territory during the pandemic with social restrictions and online learning living in Manitoba. Participants described themes related to learning, mental health, family dynamics, interpersonal competencies, and adaptive processes. These findings highlight the many systems and adaptive capacities within the youth, in relationships with caregivers, families, educators, helpers and friends, and in resources and capacities in order to support resilience in a post pandemic world. Many of these center around the powerful adaptive systems variously referred to as agency or mastery motivation, active coping, hope or optimism, and connection. The results have important implications for research and practice regarding resilience, education, and counselling.

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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to the youth that have allowed me the opportunity to have a little glimpse inside their world. You are seen, you are heard, and you matter.

Table of Contents

Abstract iv
Acknowledgements v
Dedications vi
Table of Contents vii
List of Tables xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1
Researcher Positionality 3
Purpose of the Current Study 6
Terminology Definitions 6
Mental Health 7
Resilience 8
Youth 9
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework 10
Relational Developmental Systems 11
Positive Youth Development 13
Social Ecological Resilience 16
Chapter Summary 18
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 21
Youth Mental Health & Well-Being 21
Canadian-Focused Youth Mental Health Research 24
Longitudinal Studies on Youth Mental Health 25
Resilience 28
Individual Resilience Factors 30
Resilience and Family 38
Resilience and School 42
COVID-19 Health Pandemic and Youth Mental Health 45
COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching 46
International Youth Mental Health and COVID-19 47
Canadian Youth Mental Health and COVID-19 50
Vulnerable Youth Mental Health and COVID-19 54
Educational disruptions and COVID-19 56
Resilience and COVID-19 58
Chapter Summary 60
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH 62
Qualitative Research 62
Case Study 63
Research Questions 65
Research Design 66
Procedures 66
Participants 67
Table 1 68
Table 2 69
COVID-19 Health Pandemic Context 69
2020 69
2021 73

Interview Method 78
Data Analysis 79
Chapter Summary 81
Chapter Four: Participant Stories 82
Y01 Case Story (Sam 16-year-old) 82
Y03 Case Story (Tegan 13-year-old) 89
Y04 Case Story (Bella 14-year-old) 95
Y05 Case Story (Maddy 12-year-old) 103
Chapter Five: Across Participant Findings 113
Table 3 114
Case Propositions and Qualitative Themes 114
COVID-19 Learning Impact 115
Challenges 116
Strengths 119
Missing School & Teachers 121
Learning Impact Follow Up Interviews 123
Rushed Learning 123
Difficulty of Online Learning 124
New Appreciation for In Person Learning 125
COVID-19 Mental Health Impact 127
Stress 127
Worry 130
Missing Friends 132
Mental Health Impact Follow Up Interviews 133
Mental Health Concerns 134
Missing Friends & Milestones 136
Long Haul Mental Health Impacts 138
Improvement in Stress & Anxiety 139
Importance of Mental Health 141
Youth Individual Competencies 141
Personal Attributes 142
Coping Strategies 142
Youth Individual Competencies Follow Up Interviews 144
Personal Attributes 144
Coping Strategies 145
COVID-19 Family Dynamics 146
New Roles 146
Increased Irritability 149
Family Dynamics Follow Up Interviews 150
Family Closeness 150
Increased Independence 152
Parental Mental Health Strain 153
Adaptive Systems & Processes 154
Parental Educational Support 154
Parental Educational Support Follow Up Interviews 156
Teachers 157

Teachers Follow Up Interviews 162
Family School Collaboration 165
Family School Collaboration Follow Up Interviews 168
Hope & Motivation 171
Increased Motivation 172
Hope & Optimism for the Future 173
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION 175
Summary of Major Findings 175
COVID-19 Learning 176
COVID-19 Mental Health 179
Interpersonal Competencies 182
Adaptive Systems and Processes 183
Family Dynamics 183
Teachers 184
Family School Collaboration 186
Hope 187
Limitations 189
Implications for Theory and Research 190
Implications for Practice 194
Researcher Experiences 199
Conclusion 200
References 202
Appendix A 248
Recruitment Poster 248
Appendix B 249
Youth Interview Guide 249
Appendix C 253
Parent/Guardian Guide 253

List of Tables

Table 1-Youth Participant Demographics……68
Table 2- Parent Participant Demographics……69
Table 3- Case Propositions and Qualitative Themes……...114

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization's (2023a) statement "there is no health without mental health" (p. 1) highlights the fundamental nature of well-being in an era marked by a time of uncertainty and transition, where youth mental health is at risk and understanding resilience is critical (Kieling et al., 2011; Malla et al., 2018; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013; Sawyer et al., 2001; Wiens et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2009). Integral to healthy development, child and youth mental health encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral well-being (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2015). Understanding mental health from a perspective of resources instead of deficits is indicative of a shift from a pathological to a salutogenic approach centered around mental wellness (Antonovsky, 1987; Mittelmark & Bauer, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of many and youth who have experienced profound uncertainty. Since the onset of the pandemic, youth have experienced worsening mental health and the long-term impacts are unknown (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Findlay & Arim, 2020; Findlay et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). As health and education research begins to emerge, there is an evident gap in the exploration of factors that contribute to the promotion of the mental well-being of youth. This thesis is situated in this gap of literature. The salutogenic approach is necessary to understand youth capacity, thriving, and resilience within adverse conditions and thus, further research must be centered on exploring how youth have experienced and made meaning of the pandemic. While youth mental, social, and educational well-being remains susceptible to the consequences of the global pandemic, it is imperative that we examine the experiences associated with adaptation to better understand resilience, from an ecological perspective, as a key determinant of students' academic and developmental success (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; McPherson et

al., 2014). The purpose of my study is to explore mental health and well-being amongst youth in Manitoba during the global COVID-19 health pandemic as a means of uncovering the role of contextual influences and multi-level resources when youth are faced with adversity.

The Relational Developmental Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner et al., 2011; Overton, 2015) and Social Ecological Resilience (Ungar, 2012) are theoretical approaches within educational psychology that encompass contextualized understandings of human development and resilience processes. These approaches are well suited to my study which examines what experiences mobilized or restored youth well-being and recovery particularly while schools were conducting emergency remote instruction. Understanding developmental potentials and adaptive processes and assets is vital to promoting youth mental wellness, from a Positive Youth Development (Benson et al., 2006) perspective. Positive Youth Development represents a conceptual lens which understands youth development by way of developmental contexts and the innate ability for youth to flourish and thrive (Benson et al., 2006).

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, education changed drastically (Statistics Canada, 2021). In Manitoba, Canada, schooling for children and youth changed to a remote emergency instruction format (Nagle et al., 2020). Youth had to experience learning from new and unique hybrid approaches of delivery. For many, sudden changes to their daily lives felt completely disruptive. There is a need to learn about youth mental health experiences during this time in order to best be able to provide more valued resources and support. Hopefully, the implications of this study could be related to reducing any detrimental long-term impacts from this global crisis for youth in Manitoban schools. Positive Youth Development and resilience frameworks support the uncovering of the role of contextual influences and multilevel resources such as schools and family when youth are faced with adverse conditions such as the COVID-19

health pandemic. My study explores the many systems and adaptive capacities of youth, to better understand how to cultivate resilience at this point in the ongoing pandemic. Held on January 27, 2023, at the most recent meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) Emergency Committee regarding the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, it was declared that COVID-19 was still ongoing and continues to constitute a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) (WHO, 2023b). While officials advised that it was possible that the pandemic was nearing an inflexion point, long-term public health action is still necessary.

Researcher Positionality

A shared space, the research process is shaped and impacted by both researcher and participants (England, 1994). Engaging and conducting qualitative research requires a rigorous researcher to reflect on their positionality. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) state that positionality "reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" (p. 71). Reflexive processes throughout the research process require ongoing scholarly reflexivity and personal insights and as Pelias (2011) describes a process in which researchers "ethically and politically self-aware, make themselves part of their own inquiry" (p. 662). What brought me to the research topic, my identity and lived experiences, and how forces shaped and influenced all the research elements requires me to think reflexively about how contexts interact and impact research methods and findings. The process of reflexivity aids researchers to understand the boundaries of what they can see and assists in understanding from their partial and positioned perspectives, their biases, values, and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding the interaction of my identity and role in this research, my relationship to the participants as children's counsellor who actively works in the community with youth, and the interview

process inherently positions me as the researcher to be perspectival and close to the research itself (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

I came to understand my commitment and investment in youth well-being and mental health and the influences at play in their betterment, through a deep reflective process. I have worked in several nonprofit organizations, working towards supporting youth and their families, in collaboration with the systems in which they learn and live. These experiences significantly shaped my research interests in youth development and commitment to social issues that work to oppress marginalized youth at risk. Working within the child welfare system serving as a children's therapist, I recognize the power and privilege that comes along with my position and my existence in this space as a white, educated, Eurocentric woman and the historically oppressive authority of the system in which I work.

I am a second-generation Portuguese Canadian woman, non-disabled, university educated, dominant official language speaker, middle class, cisgender, straight woman. My culture and gender significantly influence my life and identity and impact my lived experiences. Growing up in northern Manitoba, I was cognizant of the unique social challenges and hardships that came with the geographical positioning of my community. These included poorer socio-economic conditions, limitation of services, and urbanization which disproportionately impact the growing health and social disparities among marginalized populations and groups, primarily related to social determinates of health. Access to the social determinates of health are often constrained by structural vulnerabilities which are risks imposed by systems of power and oppression that create and maintain sociocultural, economic, and political inequities (Woolf et al., 2007). In conducting this research, it was critical that I describe how I am positioned in the social world in which the research takes place. Working within a child welfare system as a

children's therapist I am positioned as a front-line responder who supports youth as they navigate the unique hurdles of development, mental health, and well-being. The literature has clearly highlighted the relationship between being in care and the exposure to adversity and longer-term negative impacts (Barker et al., 2014). Youth exposed to the system are more likely to engage in risky behaviors in comparison to their peer groups (Mendes, 2005; Rutter, 2000). Furthermore, my collaborative work with community and educational colleagues positions me uniquely to observe and interpret the many challenges and obstacles within that context.

While my immigrant parents worked to plant roots in an unfamiliar land, I was tasked with navigating the cultural tensions between my familial culture, traditions, and values and those of this land I call home. As the first in my family to graduate from high school and to go on to post-secondary education, I recognize the access to resources I have that my family did not. As a child of non-English speaking parents, I was fluent in another language before ever learning English. I struggled with the language barrier in my early years which later presented difficulties with text comprehension, reading, and writing. Similarly, my non-English speaking parents struggled to collaborate and communicate with my teachers and school staff. Completely dependent on academic support from my teachers and additional educational assistant support, I experienced many of the challenges of navigating the adverse effects of needing additional support in the classroom. While I have never been diagnosed with a learning difficulty, I can attempt to relate to the experiences of struggle and tension within the education systems of many of the youth in this study.

I have been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, as a graduate student existing and treading the waters of learning in a virtual world like the participants of this research. Similar to the idea of the “insider perspective” in ethnography research, this in many ways positions me

with a “lived familiarity” of the culture under investigation (Darwin Holmes, 2020, p. 6). While this allowed me to ask more meaningful interview questions due to my knowledge of being embedded within the culture of emergency remote studentship, it also presented potential challenges associated with over sympathizing and personal experience biases and preconceptions that I had to mitigate while conducting the interviews and analysis.

In many ways, my early experiences with learning difficulties and current position as a graduate student during the COVID-19 pandemic gives me an insider perspective by which I was able to empathize and interpret participant’s experiences. In the same breath, I also embody an outside perspective in my identity, and I do not necessarily understand the subculture of my participants. This dichotomous experience of the insider-outsider perspective experienced by qualitative researchers embodies the multidimensional complex experience of people and the importance of the reflexive process (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Purpose of the Current Study

The purpose of this study is to explore youth mental health and well-being among youth in Manitoba during the COVID-19 health pandemic. Youth participated in virtual qualitative interviews regarding their experiences with emergency remote learning, mental health, and hope. Using an exploratory holistic case design, this study attempted to determine how participants navigated the initial stages of the COVID-19 health pandemic. Four youth were interviewed at two different time periods during COVID-19 and so were their parents. A total of 16 interviews were completed to gain an in-depth and multi-perspective understanding about how youth are navigating during COVID-19.

Terminology Definitions

Consistency and clarity amongst terms and constructs within the current empirical scope of literature remains problematic for researchers and academics. For the purpose of my research, I will draw on my theoretically informed understanding of mental health, youth development, and resilience in order to define and discuss the constructs relevant to my thesis. Additionally, the constructs of *mental health*, *resilience*, and *youth* will be explored utilizing formative literature and research as it pertains to the field of counselling, education, and youth development. While I will draw on contextually relevant sources within the field such as the World Health Organization and the Canadian Mental Health Association, I will also offer critical perspectives to support the definitions and experiences of the youth being investigated in this study.

Mental Health

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2001) states that *mental health* is "a state of well-being in which you can realize your own potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and make contributions to your community" (p. 1). Often mental health has been expressed as simply the absence of mental disorder. This description does not encompass the fundamental aspects of health in our human development and our ability to persevere amidst adversities by way of good mental health (WHO, 2001). Further to the WHO's declaration of health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being," good mental health is about wellness rather than illness. Understanding mental health from a complex continuum-based perspective of functioning eliminates the use of mental health as a negative or illness but more as the wholistic constitution of human well-being and development. Often referred to as good mental health, positive mental health, mental well-being, wellness, and subjective well-being, these terms do not necessarily imply a static state of happiness — but the capacity for

someone to think, feel, and act in a way that enable us to enjoy life and offer protection against adversities and reduce the development of mental health problems (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2015). For the purpose of this thesis, I use mental health to mean a wholistic sense of well-being experienced by all youth that must be understood from a strengths-based, ecologically informed perspective. Within my study, mental health is not reflective of clinical terminology; instead, it is understood within the context of each youth's personal experiences and language.

Resilience

Resilience has been interpreted and defined by many scholars since its emergence throughout which time definitions have evolved (Anthony, 1974; Kalathil et al., 2011; Kolar, 2011; Lerner et al., 2011; Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2012; Werner & Smith, 1982). An ecological perspective of resilience emphasizes the mutually influential relationship between youth and their multiple levels of context (Lerner et al., 2011). Emphasizing the complexity and role of these interactions and behaviors over time allows us to cultivate opportunities for personal growth amidst challenging and adverse circumstances (Ungar, 2012).

It is important to acknowledge the criticism surrounding mainstream clinical recovery model-based theories of resilience as it applies to those experiencing adversity and distress **(**Voronka, 2019). The early understandings of resilience conceptualized it as an intrinsic characteristic to be developed and cultivated, positioning the onus of responsibility on the individual (Anthony, 1974; Kalathil et al., 2011; Werner & Smith, 1982). I reject this individual perspective and holistically understand resilience as a function of bidirectional influences in the promotion of youth development (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This shifts the emphasis and onus of responsibility from the individual to an emphasis on interactions within and across multi level systems of that individual's experiences.

Anne Masten, a developmental psychologist and resilience researcher, is known for studying the processes that help children and families deal with adversity. She conceptualizes resilience as an "ordinary human adaptive process" which emerges despite adversity as a result of complex interactions between individuals and systems leading to a dynamic understanding of the phenomenon (Masten, 2001, p. 234). Adversity refers to experiences that may pose a significant challenge, disruption or potential threat to the stability, viability, adaptation, and development necessary for typical functioning of those exposed to it. As a children's therapist, I have noticed the upheaval of the pandemic in the youth I see and thus, in my research I have conceptualized the COVID-19 global health pandemic and its multisystemic challenges as adverse (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020).

Ungar (2012), a researcher in the field of social and psychological resilience, describes resilience as a "set of behaviors over time that reflect the interactions between individuals and their environments, in particular the opportunities for personal growth that are available and accessible" (p. 14). From this perspective a youth's system of care, family, educational system, and community are all critical in influencing the youth's individual psychological development particularly in the face of adversity (Ungar, 2012). My study draws on these Social Ecological definitions and understandings of resilience.

Youth

Youth includes people aged 12 to 25 years old which encompasses early adolescence and emerging adulthood (World Health Organization, 2005). During this formative period of growth and transition, youth experience a notable amount of change in their biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional developmental domains (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). While adolescence is a period of remarkable opportunity for

growth, it is also the most likely phase of life in which people experience mental health struggles and challenges to well-being (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). One in five children and youth will have a mental health problem such as anxiety symptoms, behavioral problems, depressive symptoms, or substance use problems and only one in five will receive mental health services in support of their difficulties (Boyle et al., 1987; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012; Merikangas et al., 2009; Offord et al., 1987; Waddell et al., 2002). These symptomologies can present themselves as a common experience or manifest into more severe debilitating issues throughout the life of a child often understood as a mental health disorder. While this study is not interested in measuring the occurrence of mental health problems, or more specifically diagnosed mental health disorders of youth, it is important to note this biomedical conception of poor mental health when seeking to understand this vulnerable population. Alternatively, this study is interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the multidimensional experiences of youth mental health and well-being from a wholistic perspective.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

My research is informed by the developmental systems theoretical framework Relational Developmental Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner et al., 2011; Overton, 2015), and further draws on the process oriented Social Ecological Resilience model (Ungar, 2012) and the Positive Youth Development model (Benson et al., 2006) to understand youth development, mental health, and resilience. This guiding framework directs my exploration of contextual influences and multi-level factors that youth experience when faced with significant adversity such as the global COVID-19 pandemic. Embedded within a developmental systems metatheory of understanding, Positive Youth Development my chosen conceptual approach emphasizes the

relation between person–environment interactions in which resources and processes are harnessed to promote positive community and youth well-being and mental health. From this perspective, youth possess resources that can be developed, nurtured, and cultivated as significant determinants of youth well-being (Lerner, 2009). Together these three perspectives formulate my theoretical and conceptual understandings of youth development and well-being, resilience, and system level influences.

Relational Developmental Systems

The Relational Developmental Systems (RDS) understanding of human development puts emphasis on the mechanisms, processes, and bi-directional exchanges related to individual and contextual relations (Lerner, 2009; Overton, 2015). From this perspective, the mutually influential relations between individual and context are described as individual ↔context (bidirectional) relations and understood across place and time contextually. In conjunction with the Positive Youth Development perspective, the Relational Developmental Systems understanding of the role of multi-level resources and processes, and their role in promoting youth well-being and resilience is critical to my research. Suited to examining what factors mobilized and restored youth well-being and adaption while schools were conducting emergency remote instruction, my study will examine contextual influences for youth resilience during the pandemic including, but not limited to, schools, peers, and family. Rejecting a reductionist nature-nurture view of development RDS theory highlights the importance of the relationship versus simply one aspect or the other. As described by Overton (2015), a formative American psychologist and researcher in the fields of clinical and developmental psychology:

> …Relational-Developmental-Systems as a metatheory characterizes the living organism as an inherently active, self-creating (autopoetic, enactive), self-organizing, and self-

> regulating, relatively plastic, nonlinear complex adaptive system. The system's development occurs through its own embodied activities and actions operating coactively in a lived world of physical and sociocultural objects, according to the principle of probabilistic epigenesis. (p. 47)

This principle of adaptation emphasizes the potential of systematic change in the individual and context relations which ultimately equates to the possibility of optimizing human development. Understanding the processes that regulate exchanges between individual and context serves as a point for exploration to better support individuals in their development (Overton, 2015). Relational Development Systems is grounded in the idea that youth have the inherent capacity to change towards individual and social well-being. Furthermore, this approach highlights the dynamic processes that occur between individual and context while seeking to understand human capacity and potential (Damon, 2004). This shift from understanding risk and mitigating impact to recognizing strengths and engaging potentialities should be applied to all youth and individuals as a way of promoting good mental health and well-being.

From Lerner and colleagues' (2013) perspective, the overarching goal of adolescent developmental research is to identify the individual and ecological conditions that reflect resilience. Resilience represents the many ways in which individuals adapt successfully to adversity (Egeland et al., 1993; Rutter, 2012; Wright & Masten, 2015). Lerner et al. (2013) defined resilience from a Positive Youth Development perspective as a dynamic attribute referencing the adaptive and mutually influential relation of an individual adolescent and that person's context. From this perspective, resilience is not in the person or the context but in their connection and relation to each other. This implies that there are efforts that can be taken to sustain or enhance the quality of the context in order to support positive adolescent development

(Lerner et al., 2013). Underlying the notion of Positive Youth Development is the idea of intentional change and purposeful action to promote positive developmental processes such as resilience. Resilience is, then, for Lerner et al. (2013), "a dynamic attribute of a relationship between an individual adolescent and his or her multilevel and integrated (relational) developmental system" (p. 293). The Relational Developmental Systems framework informed my exploration of individual and ecological mechanisms, processes, and bi-directional exchanges during unprecedented adversity in order to better understand youth potentialities and well-being.

Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development encompasses a critical body of scientific inquiry including theory, research, and practice models (Benson et al., 2006). Rooted in the theoretical traditions of developmental psychology, Positive Youth Development draws on human development, community organization and development, and social and community change theory. Interdisciplinary in nature, the field of Positive Youth Development has many definitions and conceptualizations. While academics in the field have yet to reach consensus on a definite definition of Positive Youth Development, most can agree on the following components: developmental contexts, the nature of the child with emphasis on the inherent capacity to grow and thrive, developmental strengths, the reduction of high-risk behaviors, and the promotion of thriving (Benson et al., 2006). This conceptualization of youth mental health and well-being is fundamental to my study's strengths-based exploration of resilience processes, which can be uncovered and nurtured within the context of adversity to support every youth's ability to do well and experience positive outcomes.

Critical of mainstream psychological inquiry, which has centralized its ideas of development on pathology and deficit, the Positive Youth Development framework understands the developmental processes of youth mental health from a strengths-based perspective (Benson et al., 2006). As described by Damon (2004), a leading scholar of human development, the framework "emphasizes the manifest potentialities rather than the supposed incapacities of young people…" (p. 15). Rejecting the notion that positive development, good mental health, and resilience occurs solely by way of processes centered on improving and awakening personal character traits, this shifts the focus to emphasize the critical nature of positive development indicators and promotion of processes that contribute to well-being. Further to this shift is the critical emphasis on how and what youths' ecologies can do to promote positive development, no longer centering on the individual. This framework prioritizes the intersection between the individual and their context to promote adaptive processes and well-being. This understanding of mental health and youth development drives my own conceptualization of good mental health as being dependent on not just the individual, but the contexts and systems in which they are embedded such as family and school, and the purposeful action in which they exist and develop.

Thus, in my study, from this perspective, well-being and positive youth development occurs when intentional change is enacted to "enhance the fusion of person and context in a healthy direction" as described by Benson et al. (2006, p. 910). Positive youth development and well-being thus, is a result of system driven intentional opportunities which invite youth to actively exercise and utilize their capacity for growth and engagement (Benson et al., 2006). For this reason, Positive Youth Development, and the foundational belief that all youth have the inherent capacity for positive growth and well-being when their ecologies facilitate intentional

change processes such as resilience, encompasses the lens in which my research conceptualizes mental health and youth development (Benson et al., 2006).

Centered around youth potentialities and capacities to act on the environment, this framework highlights the role of active pathways in fostering positive developmental processes. This is further explained by the bidirectional nature of person-ecology interactions (Lerner, 2009). A positive developmental trajectory is activated when youth are embedded in relationships, contexts, and ecologies that nurture their development (Benson et al., 2006). This is further enabled when youth have the opportunity to participate in multiple, nutrient rich relationships, contexts, and ecologies such as family and school. As viable and critical delivery systems for positive youth development, family and school will be points of inquiry for my research. Investigating and promoting development and well-being from a comprehensive, multi-level perspective requires the uncovering of the role of adaptive processes and valued resources when youth are experiencing adversity. Following a Positive Youth Development framework, I understand youth as major actors in their own development and as significant resources in enabling positive development and well-being by investigating their unique personal attributes and resources (Benson et al., 2006)

An important aspect of the Positive Youth Development Framework is the push towards both individual improvement and social success, and population developmental well-being (Benson et al., 2006). Lorion and Sokoloff (2003) argue that “all soil can be enriched, and all moisture and sunlight maximally used to nourish all flowers” (p. 137), highlighting the maximization of benefit and potential both individually and societally. When the focus of positive well-being and good mental health is no longer placed on the individual but the systems of care, everyone benefits from the strengths-based understandings, interactions, contexts, and

processes (Benson et al., 2006). The developmental assets of all youth can be cultivated through developmental rich relationships and contexts (Benson et al., 2006).

Offering a paradigm shift from the pathology–deficit–risk model-oriented understandings of youth development, Positive Youth Development conceptualizes youth potential and developmental, ecological, and social process from a unique theoretical orientation (Damon & Gregory, 2003; Lerner, 2009). This perspective is critical in understanding the protective and promotive factors and processes necessary to buffer against the adversities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on understanding the experiences in which youth resilience was built as they experienced these unknown terrains is critical in identifying, enhancing, and utilizing youth strengths and promoting positive outcomes in order to address an emerging mental health crisis. Furthermore, this holistic approach to understanding and supporting youth is best suited to promoting the mobilization and restoration of all youth well-being and resilience.

Social Ecological Resilience

Nested within the Relational Developmental Systems framework the Social Ecological perspective conceptualizes that "resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities" (Masten, 2001, p. 235). My research is guided by a contextual and developmental lens by which we can more richly understand the adaptive systems and processes that engage youth at multiple levels to facilitate resilience and positive development. Exploring the ecologies that nurture youth development offers insight into the potentialities that can be enriched, rather than the supposed incapacities of those at a higher risk for adverse mental health experiences during the pandemic (Findlay & Arim, 2020).

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) conceptualization of developmental contexts places a youth at the center of a system of bidirectional influences including those proximally closer such as their families and home to systems such as culture and time further from the center. Conceptualizing individual's interactions with their multiple levels of influence—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macro systems—as described by Bronfenbrenner (1992) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) offers a fuller understanding of resilience beyond the notion of internal and external assets or psychological superior or inferiority. Nested within interpersonal, community, organizational, and policy driven environments, resilience is cultivated through interaction where adversity is. Whereby, the "capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways" to contribute to good mental health (Ungar, 2008, p. 225).

Dependent on social ecology, resilience is categorized by its four principles of decentralism, complexity, atypicality, and cultural relativity (Ungar, 2012). Reflecting on these four pillars and contextual variance, resilience can be described as "the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being" (Ungar, 2008, p. 225). By way of this definition resilience becomes a "shared experience" of both the individual and the systems in which it is embedded (Ungar, 2012). This approach removes the onus from the individual and highlights the critical role of the environment as it plays a role in cultivating a catalyst for resilience to grow in the face of significant adversity. From this perspective, resilience is not in the person or the context but in their connection and relation to each other. The interdependent nature of resilience and environment becomes integral in the face of a global pandemic. Relevant to this research influences such as

family experiences, close relationships, peers, and school roles will be important to explore through the use of in-depth qualitative descriptions.

Chapter Summary

The theoretical framework my research is based upon is the Relational Developmental Systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner et al., 2011; Overton, 2015) and the Positive Youth Development (Benson et al., 2006) and Social Ecological Resilience (Ungar, 2012) conceptual models. The process orientated contextualized framework of understanding the individual in Relational Developmental Systems and Social Ecological Resilience perspectives, is further expanded within Positive Youth Development to promote growth and development through the bidirectional context-person relationships amongst multiple levels of systems (Lerner, 2009).

While Positive Youth Development and Social Ecological Resilience have many unique qualities as standalone frameworks, they are both rooted in the developmental theory and have evolved with the field to reflect more closely a developmental systems theory (Masten, 2014a). These frameworks share pillars of systems around positive adaptation, translational interactions across systems, and overlapping goals of promoting positive development that compliment one and other and thus, their complimentary nature positions them to be best suited for this research.

As described by Lerner et al. (2002) “changes across the life span are seen as propelled by the dynamic relations between the individual and the multiple levels of the ecology of human development (family, peer, group, school, community, culture), all changing interdependently across time (history)” (pp. 13-14). While these ecological levels are interdependent, they can interconnect, interact, and adapt dynamically. When ecologies understand youth as inherently capable, they are able to take action to facilitate processes that support youth to persevere and

thrive so they can reach their full potential. This unified belief is fundamental to all the underlying theories of this research. Furthermore, Social Ecological Resilience theory offers a framework which broadens my understanding of adaptation and processes within the context of extreme adversity and challenge such as COVID-19.

Using this interrelated theoretical framework, my research will further broaden the understanding of supportive mechanisms to well-being and mental health in the face of adversity exposure such as unexpected mass-trauma events like the global pandemic on youth. Relevant to the present research is the exploration of contextual and multi-level influences such as family and school factors as they contribute to good mental health and well-being of youth. Youth mental, social, and educational well-being remains susceptible to the consequences of the global pandemic. Emerging research about the detrimental effects of the pandemic on youth mental health affirms it is imperative that we examine the experiences associated with adaptation to better understand resilience from an ecological perspective as a key determinant of students' academic and developmental well-being (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Findlay & Arim, 2020; Racine et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Relevant to the current research, these understandings assist in cultivating specific adolescent adaptive processes, and in further examining the role of resilience as a catalyst for well-being and development during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sharing a common goal, Positive Youth Development and Social Ecological Resilience theories prioritize producing action-oriented research that informs interventions and polices to promote positive development (Masten, 2014a). This is a value that aligns with my work as a graduate student and counsellor.

In this initial chapter, I explored the importance of youth well-being and resilience amidst the COVID-19 health pandemic, defined the terms relevant to this research, described my

positionality as a researcher, and explained the theoretical framework on which this study is based upon. Informed by my theoretical framework, next I turn to a review of literature relevant to the study of youth well-being and resilience in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As highlighted in Chapter One, understanding youth development, mental health, and resilience from a process oriented, contextualized framework such as Positive Youth Development and ecological approaches allows researchers invested in strengths-based approaches to identify processes and describe conditions in which youth well-being and recovery can be cultivated in the face of adversity. Throughout this literature review, I will examine youth mental health from a positive mental health perspective by way of reviewing the current scholarly landscape of youth well-being, including the role of resilience processes in promoting mental wellness. Furthermore, I adopt an ecological perspective to examining the educational psychology literature by inquiry of contextual factors and multi-level interactions such as family, school, and multi-level resources to promote growth and development (Lerner, 2009). In the conclusion of this literature review, I will summarize the emerging research on youth mental health and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Youth Mental Health & Well-Being

Adolescence is marked by uncertainty and transition as youth navigate their identities amidst the ever-changing world (Malla et al., 2018). Characterized by development and maturation, youth are challenged to adapt to their environments while striving to engage in worthwhile successful experiences. The World Health Organization (2005) states that “mental health and well-being are fundamental to quality of life, enabling people to experience life as meaningful and to be creative and active citizens. Mental health is an essential component of social cohesion, productivity, and peace and stability in the living environment, contributing to social capital and economic development in societies” (p. 1). Youth with good mental health have reduced risk for academic, behavioral, mental health difficulties, and substance use

problems and ultimately do and feel better within their experiences. From a Positive Youth Development contextually based understanding of well-being, it is essential to uncover the adaptive processes necessary to bolster youth resilience in the face of the COVID-19 global pandemic, shifting the onus of change from the innate characteristics of the youth to the multi-level systems in which they exist. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) argued persuasively in their foundational work in the field of positive psychology that "psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue" (p. 7). If we only center our focus of inquiry on what is going wrong for youth, and not what strengths and adaptive processes that facilitate them to do well in times of adversity, we cannot support youth or the systems in which they are embedded to reach their full potential.

Existing research has demonstrated the growing incidences of depression and anxiety amongst youth globally, problems affecting between 10 and 20 percent of children and adolescents (Collinshaw et al., 2010; Kessler et al., 2005; Kieling et al., 2011). Studies of youth, development, mental health, and resilience indicate a clear association between poor mental health and negative outcomes for health, education, employment, social relationships, and criminal behavior (Costello & Maughan, 2015). The social and cultural conditions of the 21st century may be contributing to the current worsening mental health climate (Bor et al., 2014). Studies in developmental psychology and counselling psychology have sought to understand the evolving trends of incidence and prevalence of mental health in youth, highlighting the increase of mental health symptoms globally particularly in the case of internalized symptoms amongst girls (Bor et al., 2014; Collishaw, 2015). One in five children worldwide, a group which encompasses youth, will experience mental health problems, additionally, only one in five of them who require mental health services receive them (Kieling et al., 2011; Mental Health

Commission of Canada, 2013; Sawyer et al., 2001). These trends exemplify why youth are worthy of being explored in research.

Merikangas' et al. (2010) international research has demonstrated that the most common mental health conditions include anxiety disorders (31.9%), followed by behavioral disorders (19.1%), mood disorders (14.3%) and substance use disorders (11.4%). Within a nationally representative sample of American youth, the media age of onset for disorder classes was anxiety at six years old, followed by 11 years old for behavior, 13 years old for mood, and 15 years old for substance use (Merikangas et al., 2010). Between 50% and 75% of mental health disorders in adulthood begin before the age of 15 (Merikangas et al., 2010). These evident early onset points of mental health disorders positions youth as a population in need of scholarly attention and investigation within the context of this study (Kessler et al., 2005; Kim-Cohen et al., 2003). The onslaught of research centered on the biomedical model of mental health draws great attention to deficits and risk-based understanding of youth, but it views mental health through a vacuum overlooking many factors which contribute to promoting positive youth development and developing healthy and thriving youth. When mental health and well-being is understood within the context of a fundamental component of overall health and human existence, lessons can be learned about what helps youth do well and what they need more of. Increased well-being and positive mental health itself can serve as a tool by which youth are able to thrive and adapt within adversity and making it essential to foster and prioritize. Further exemplifying why I have adopted a Positive Youth Development framework and why it is necessary to contribute to research from this perspective as a way of finding innovative ways to promote resilience in the face of adversity.

As changes in mental health deterioration prevalence continue to present themselves so does the need for further study. The research of Dubey and colleagues (2020) has helped expose the role of factors such as loneliness, social isolation, family stressors, exposure to maltreatment and abuse, and systemic racism and their impacts on well-being and contributions to emotional difficulties amongst youth. Within the context of the 21st century, youth are particularly susceptible to mental health difficulties because of varying social and cultural factors. As Collishaw (2015) outlined, individual vulnerability, family life, extrafamilial influences on risk, and broader cultural change are plausible explanations for the shift in mental health diagnoses. Adopting a biomedical reductionist approach in understanding youth by way of reducing their mental health experiences to that of prevalence of diagnostic and assessment-based concerns and disorders is simply not enough to understand youth and their experiences. An Evidence Check facilitated by Rickwood and Thomas (2019), included 92 systematic reviews that identified risk and protective factors for mental health and well-being. Findings suggested that risk factors for teenagers included high screen time and cyberbullying, poor family functioning, chronic illness and obesity, out of home care, factors related to refugee status, and high demand academic environments, whereas, protective factors included positive family functioning, social support including online community support and physical activity (Rickwood & Thomas, 2019). It is important to note the contradictions and tensions between risk and protective factors and mental health disorder prevalence and experiences of well-being and mental. Furthermore, it is imperative that these differences be exposed and overcome in order for resilience scholarship centered on positive aspects of development and strengths to be valued and prioritized.

Canadian-Focused Youth Mental Health Research

There is a growing prevalence of mental health concerns amongst Canadian adolescents. Wiens et al. (2020) examined both perceived mental health status and professionally diagnosed mood and anxiety disorders amongst 12–24-year-old Canadian adolescents. Trends from 2011-2018 showed an increase in prevalence of poor/fair mental health and professionally diagnosed mood and anxiety disorders. Most prevalent amongst young women's (12-24 years old) perceptions of poor/fair mental health increased by (3.8–9.5%; p= 0.001), with increases of 1.0% per year for mood disorders and 1.6% per year for anxiety disorders. Out of 38 countries Canada ranks 35th on teen suicide rates, with adolescent boys from Indigenous communities showing significant greater risk than their counter parts (Statistics Canada, 2019). In 2015/2016, 8% of First Nations youth, aged 12 to 17 years, had been diagnosed with anxiety, alongside 7% who had been diagnosed with mood disorders, and 3% with attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2018). This underscores the importance of attending to multiple contextual factors in understandings of mental health.

Longitudinal Studies on Youth Mental Health

While several studies have taken on the task of capturing reliable data, the challenges associated with measurement continue to impact researchers' abilities to capture a clear picture of the landscape of mental health in society over time (Bor et al., 2014; Collinshaw et al., 2010). The findings of Blomqvist et al. (2019) were of benefit in further broadening the understanding of secular changes on youth's internalized mental health symptoms and conduct problems from 1980-2014 amongst Swedish adolescents. This cross-sectional study compared two geographically similar groups of adolescents in 1981 and 2014. The results were indicative of an increase of anxiety, depression, and functional somatic symptoms for both boys and girls, with a greater increase being noted in girls. Furthermore, rates of conduct problems decreased for both

boys and girls. While limitations surrounding changes in expression of terms were considered, the measurement validity, and generalizability of this study offered a greater understanding of the increased mental health problems amongst youth over the last three decades.

The findings of this formative research by Blomqvist et al. (2019), Bor et al. (2014), and Collinshaw et al. (2010) while valuable, contributed to the wide gap in literature surrounding non-binary, intersex and queer identifying youth (Rutherford et al., 2021). The Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning or Intersex (2SLGBTQI+) community faces great adversity in simply existing within the context of discrimination, marginalization, and oppressive communities (Almeida et al., 2009; Fergusson et al., 1999; Hafeez et al., 2017; Russell & Fish, 2016). To date, the research on 2SLGBTQI+ identifying youth's mental health experiences has had a predominantly quantitively focus much like that of their non identifying peers (Wilson & Cariola, 2020). While this study will not focus specifically on 2SLGBTQI+ youth, the valuable literature in the area and the gap of qualitative research poses me to reflect on the importance of capturing and uncovering the ordinary magic of resilience from the perspective of all youth. This requires that scholars execute inclusive intersectional research centered on those who have been embedded within multi-level systems riddled with adversity and barriers, as a way to understand and challenge social inequalities which pose threats to positive development.

A systematic review of 19 epidemiological studies conducted across 12 countries completed by Bor et al. (2014) examining cohort and population studies was employed in hopes of contributing to the understanding of changes in mental health of children over time. Of the 19 toddler, child, and adolescent focused studies examined, 17 explored internalizing problems and 11 focused on externalizing concerns (Bor et al., 2014). While children and toddler centered

studies did not depict declining mental health symptoms amongst their participants, adolescent focused studies painted a picture of worsening conditions with a majority describing an increase (30-50%) in internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety) particularly for girls (Bor et al., 2014). While results were mixed for boys, these findings render data that supports the worsening mental health states of adolescent girls. Externalizing concerns showed no change, with only two studies reporting an increase in symptoms for girls (Bor et al., 2014).

The above review of literature depicts the ongoing worsening mental health climate of youth. As the emerging differences in youth mental health may be explained by actual worsening mental health conditions it is important to note that it may also indicate the possibility of diminishing stigma and increase in awareness and potential to seek help (Knafo et al., 2008). Findings from the existing literature highlight the growing prevalence of youth mental health concerns through a highly weighted quantitative pathological lens. Relying solely on measurement and multivariate models of quantitative methods poses limitations to understanding the in-depth experiences of youth. The only way to understand this complex social and contextual phenomena and the feelings and impressions of youth is qualitative research. Research like my study is needed to holistically conceptualize the landscape of youth well-being and mental health. Through this process, I have come to recognize the role of qualitative research as fundamental to social change. Offering an in-depth look at very specific phenomenon, qualitative research has the ability to shift participants experiences from numbers to rich accounts of youth's experience, ultimately amplifying the voices of youth who are not often listened to.

Furthermore, exploration of contextual influences and multi-level factors that youth experience when faced with significant adversity, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, is

critical to contextually understanding youth mental health holistically. If, as Roth and Brooks-Guinn (2003) suggest, we might view "youth as resources to be developed rather than problems to be managed" (p. 172), then research can be used to help cultivate resilience, which emerges despite adversity. Youth's well-being can be understood as a resource to encourage and nurture, instead of a risk to be managed in adversity. Understanding the role of factors that promote individual and societal competencies, functioning, and resilience in the face of adversities and challenges supports the notion of good mental health. Although, it is critical that we understand that "the relationship between resilience, mental health and social outcomes are complex, non-linear and bi-directional" (Khanlou & Wray, 2014, p. 70), it is evident in the literature that promoting resilience in youth can contribute to better outcomes and well-being, making it an area worthwhile of research. Thus, describing what factors mobilized or restored youth well-being and recovery, particularly while schools were conducting emergency remote instruction, is necessary to capture the person-environment interactions necessary to facilitate processes that promote positive community and youth well-being and mental health.

Resilience

Literature on resilience and well-being in the context of adversity has brought attention to common protective factors such as close relationships, psychological skills and capacities, and community-based supports (Gartland et al., 2019; Masten, 2014a; Masten et al., 2015; Meng et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2013). The Buffalo Creek disaster of 1972 was one of the first of its kind to produce longitudinal data on the impact of major disasters on child development (Korol et al., 2002). When the collapse of a coal-slurry dam occurred in this small community resulting in 125 lives lost, a lawsuit against the company led to longitudinal data on the experiences of the surviving adults and children. This event rendered findings that would be replicated in later

adversity research highlighting worsening adjustment with greater exposure to destruction and death, a range of mental health symptoms, and notable age and sex differences (Green et al., 1994). Green et al. (1994) revealed that older children were most likely to experience post traumatic stress, furthermore, a link between family functioning and child well-being was observed. In their longitudinal findings 17 years later, researchers concluded that many of the young people were doing ok and most had even recovered from the impact of the disaster by adulthood (Green et al., 1994; Korol et al., 2002). This raises the question of why and how resilience occurred over time in these youth in spite of experiencing such a horrendous event. Not long after the idea of resilience emerged in the literature on risk for psychopathology in the 1970's, the variation in responses of children to disasters was folded into this emerging social science (e.g., Garmezy & Rutter, 1983).

Today, there is diverse and growing literature on resilience in the context of different kinds of adversity (Danese et al., 2020; Fothergill, 2017; Masten et al., 2015). Commonly referenced as protective factors, identifying, promoting, and incorporating these preventative measures in youth's lives decreases the likelihood of problem behaviors and increases the likelihood of positive behavior (Catalano et al., 2012). Researchers at the Search Institute have been working to highlight the role of multilevel factors such as positive adult and family support, commitment to learning, sense of purpose, and positive values as a way to expand the understanding of developmental assets (Leffert et al., 1998; Scales et al., 2000). The Social Ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and other transactional theories posit that youth well-being and positive mental health outcomes are a result of multiple and concurrent characteristics of the individual and environment and their complex interactions. This ordinary magic occurs across many systems and adaptive capacities

within the child and across the levels in which they are embedded, such as relationships with caregivers, families, educators, helpers and friends, and in resources and capacities provided by families, schools, and communities (Masten et al., 2015).

Masten's (2001) noteworthy compilation of ordinary adaptive processes contributing to resilience referred to as "the shortlist" identifies the capacities available to children and youth for adapting to challenges (p. 243). The renowned list consists of 11 common multilevel protective factors including effective parents and caregivers, connections to other competent and caring adults, problem solving skills, self-regulation skills, positive beliefs about the self, beliefs that life has meaning, spirituality, faith and religious affiliations, socioeconomic advantages, pro social, competent peers and friends, effective teachers and schools, and safe effective communities (Masten, 2014a). These key adaptive systems that support youth's resilience embody the developmental processes that occur at the individual level and interact across levels of function including individual, family, and school (Masten, 2014a; Masten et al., 2015).

Individual Resilience Factors

Historical research centered its efforts on understanding resilience from an individual perspective, focusing on resiliency as an assets and qualities dependant phenomenon which very much aligned with a risk and deficits model. (Anthony, 1974; Werner & Smith, 1982). Resilience as a concept evolved and has come to be ecologically informed and defined, and in turn individual level factors represent a much broader adaptive system (Lerner et al., 2011; Masten, 2001; Ungar, 2012). Cognitive, social, and emotional skills contribute to individual's resilience in turn creating opportunities for positive development and well-being (Masten, 2019). Masten (2014a) acknowledges problem-solving skills, effective behavioral and emotional self-regulation, a sense of self-efficacy and mastery motivation for positive goals, and the belief that

life has meaning as key adaptive processes in resilience (Bonanno, 2004; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Masten & Reed, 2002). These competencies are reflective of the individual traits and internal capacities of youth that can be learned, fostered, and nurtured within their embedded systems of care.

Self-regulation has been given attention in the literature for its role in contributing to resilience (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Novoa, 2014). In Fritz and colleagues' (2018) systematic review uncovering resilience factors in the face of childhood adversity, individual factors were identified including three cognitive (high: cognitive reappraisal, mental flexibility; low: rumination), four emotion regulation (high: distress tolerance; low: alcohol coping expectancy, aggression, expressive suppression), three social interaction/attachment (low: insecure attachment, disconnection/rejection, other-directedness) and three personality/self-concept resilience factors (high: self-esteem; low: ego over-control, ego under-control). Furthermore, self-regulation has also been linked to resilience and academic achievement (Nota et al., 2004). A study exploring the relationship between self-regulation and resilience amongst 365 at risk Spanish youth, aged 15-21 years, highlighted the significant and positive relationship between the two constructs (Artuch-Garde et al., 2017). Learning from mistakes (self-regulation) was a significant predictor of coping and confidence, tenacity and adaptation, and tolerance to negative situations (resilience), low-medium-high levels of self-regulation correlated with scores on resilience factors (Artuch-Garde et al., 2017). Self-control, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation have all been associated with having a strong sense of internal locus of control, impacting how youth perceive and cope with challenging circumstances (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Juby & Rycraft, 2004; Terranova et al., 2009; Wong, 2003). These above mentioned facets, are captured under the umbrella of self-regulation and are individual level factors that are

resources to be developed (Anderman, 2011; de la Fuente et al., 2015; Lerner et al., 2011). Understanding these resources as not innate to the individual, but as qualities that can be nurtured, enhanced, and promoted by a youth's ecology is essential to supporting and encouraging positive development.

While these individual resilience factors are worthy of mention, it is critical that they be understood within the context of capacities to be developed and fostered. Attributing resilience to a personal innate characteristic can be problematic and detrimental to understanding youth development, by way of limiting the potential of human growth and youth trajectories and negativing the role of social and cultural influences. Learning how to help youth involves an integrated process that considers youth within their multiple levels of being and views those multi-level systems as interacting with one and other dynamically. For example, the case of teachers collaborating with parents to support and encourage executive functioning, motivation, and agency by creating natural opportunities for mastery within the context of the school day and further promoting positive self-perceptions (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010).

Emerging within the current literature is the study of epigenetics and child and youth development. This field explores the consequences of in vitro toxic stress exposure resulting from prenatal stress, inadequate prenatal care, maternal exposure to trauma, for example (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Masten & Monn, 2015; Walsh, 2006). Of recent scholarly interest, is the role of gene-environment influences on resilience which reflect the interplay between inherited traits and the context and environment they are engaged in throughout youth's development (Champagne, 2010; Kim-Cohen et al., 2004; Kim-Cohen & Turkewitz, 2012.) Kim-Cohen and Turkewitz (2012) revealed the role of gene-environment influences in resilience in identical and fraternal twins experiencing socioeconomic deprivation, with 71% of variance in resilience being

attributed to genetic influence and temperament factors associated with genetic roots highlighted. These findings indicate that genes may play a role in youth adapting in the face of adversity and highlight the need to further understand the complex interplay between these factors. Conceptualizing these findings within a Relational Developmental Systems understanding of mutually influential relations which is understood across place and time contextually is critical. Development is a joint function of environmental influences and child characteristics, which genes are considered.

Hope and the Individual. Nested within Masten's shortlist is the notion of hope and optimism. Linked to the ability to uphold a positive and hopeful attitude amidst adversity, hope, and optimism have been found to increase youth resilience (Nelson, 2008; Walker et al., 2012). Hope as a motivating individual construct is gaining momentum in academia and practice, with literature supporting hope's role in positive youth outcomes (Schmid & Lopez, 2011; Snyder et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 2000; Valle et al., 2006) It is noted as "a potent predictor of quality of life and other positive outcome domains in a wide range of health conditions" and an "important health outcome in its own right" (Schrank et al., 2011, p. 427). Defined by Snyder and colleagues (1991) as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (p. 91). This cognitive-motivational construct understood through goals, pathways, and agency has been found to be correlated to mental health for children and adults (Snyder et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 2000; Valle et al., 2006). While traditionally depicted as an individual cognitive construct, hope much like resilience cannot be interpreted as a trait that is innate to a select subset of youth. Hope as learned construct must be understood as an intervention and resource to be utilized in supporting resilience to occur.

Hope is especially important for those who encounter unpredictable and uncontrollable circumstances (Snyder et al., 1991). Stephenson's (1991) systematic review led her to formulate a definition of hope which she concluded as "a process of anticipation that involves the interaction of thinking, acting, feeling, and relating, and is directed toward a future fulfillment that is personally meaningful" (p. 1459). As a predictor of positive mental health and well being, hope research has focused on characteristics such as self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy, positive affect, and social well-being (social relationships, interactions, and satisfaction) in adolescents (Barnum et al., 1998; Edwards et al., 2007; Esteves et al., 2013; Mahat & Scoloveno, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder et al., 1991). Seen as a positive internal resource, hope can function as a facilitator for positive adaption and as a buffer and protective mechanism against stressors (Snyder et al., 1991). Furthermore, hope must be understood beyond a notion of wishful thinking but as a dynamic psychological concept and process which is grounded in reality and possibilities to be directed and applied within youth's multitiered systems despite uncertainty. During a period of great uncertainty, I am interested to understand the role and potentiality of hope for youth during this time.

Associations between adolescent hope and emotional, psychological, and social well-being have all been explored within the literature in relation to mental health to some degree. In a short-term longitudinal study of middle and high school students, Valle and colleagues (2006) concluded that Snyder's hope construct played a functional role in psychological well-being and strength in youth. Youth who reported higher levels of hope as measured by Snyder's Hope Scale (Synder et al., 1991) were less at risk for experiencing increases in internalizing behavior problems and reductions in life satisfaction when confronted with adverse life events and in some cases predicted life satisfaction up to two years later (Marques et al., 2011; Marques et al.,

2013; Valle et al., 2006). High hope scores in school aged students have also been found to be correlated with positive social interactions, self-esteem, optimism, and academic achievement (Snyder, Cheavens et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 1997). Similarly, hope scores in youth have been found to be positively correlated with global life satisfaction (Valle et al., 2004) and inversely correlated with internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Valle et al., 2006). These quantitative findings are essential to our understanding of hope, but qualitative research is needed to further uncover the meaning of hope as a resource for youth.

Consistently, the existing research findings are indicative of a strong negative relation between hope and depression and negative affect states amongst youth (Ciarrochi et al., 2015; Geiger & Kwon, 2010; Simon et al., 2009; Swanston et al., 1999; Wong & Lim, 2009). The work of Ciarrochi and colleagues (2015) explored the significant decline of trait hope during early adolescence in a large sample of grade 7-12 Australians in a series of longitudinal studies (see also Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008). *Hopelessness* is a central variable linked to depression and suicidality (Beck et al., 1975; Rosellini & Bagge, 2014). This is particularly true in the case of youth who reported lower levels of hope and reported suffering from both academic and generalized anxiety and higher levels of depressive symptoms (Onwuegbuzie, 1998; Snyder et al., 1998; Visser et al., 2013). This negative relation between psychological well-being and hope has also been accompanied by related findings indicating higher risk-taking behaviors such as smoking, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and suicide attempts correlated with lower levels of hope amongst adolescents (Carvajal et al., 1998; Chang et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2005). Understanding that less hope is linked to more depression and more hope is connected to greater positive states underscores the critical urgency of my research in understanding the multilevel contextual factors that facilitate and foster hope amongst youth in order to promote well-being.

Approaching these questions using a qualitative methodology addresses the need to explore youth's experiences and perspectives in order to capture their unique rich accounts and interpretations of hope in the context of adversity.

According to Snyder et al. (1991), individuals who have high hope tend to appraise stressors as more challenging (as opposed to more threatening), allowing them to have motivation and the ability to find solutions to alleviate stressful feelings and navigate major life stressors. Pedrotti et al. (2008) argue that hope functions as a mediator between risk and protective factors, well-being and mental health, and academic achievement particularly in the case of neurodiverse learners (Al-Yagon & Margalit, 2018; Idan & Margalit, 2012). In its connection to well-being, hope has been found to predict well-being for youth amidst transitions such as beginning high school (Ciarrochi et al., 2015). The negative relation between psychological well-being and hope has also been accompanied by findings indicating higher risk-taking behaviors such as smoking, substance abuse, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, and lower levels of hope amongst youth (Carvajal et al., 1998; Chang et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2005). This is particularly true in the case of youth who reported lower levels of hope and simultaneously reported suffering from both academic and generalized anxiety and higher levels of depressive symptoms (Onwuegbuzie, 1998; Snyder et al., 1998; Visser et al., 2013). To better inform practice and theory of hope it is necessary that these findings be complemented by and expanded upon with qualitative research such as mine.

Walker et al. (2012) found that children who experienced the 2007 flood in Hull, England, who engaged in opportunities to reframe their situation and focus on positive outcomes through play and other home and school activities, fared better. Following Hurricane Katrina, Nelson (2008) found that youth resilience was influenced by the ability to maintain a positive

attitude, ask for and receive help, and solve problems amongst participants aged 13 to 17 years old (n=83). Hope may function as a valuable resource in the face of the many challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Laslo-Roth et al., (2021). In exploring the relations between hope, quarantine, loneliness, and psychological distress, Laslo-Roth et al. (2021) identified the function of hope as a predictor of decreased distress and loneliness highlighting the meaningful role of hope during stress and uncertainty. My study seeks to complement what we already know about hope and further contribute to a richer understanding of hope through a qualitative approach.

While studies exploring causal relationships between hope and mental health in youth remain sparse, it is evident that hope has the potential to act as a positive resource in the face of challenges and adversity. Social distancing measures and COVID-19 prevention protocols restricted youth from utilizing the valuable resources and processes necessary to coping and doing well such as extra curriculars, face to face connection and family. Hope as a resource is a valuable resource for enhancing well-being when other resources are not available. Hope research has been predominantly focused on studying adults; few studies have highlighted the role of hope in developing adolescents and children. This is why it is important to ask the youth in my study about hope (Jiang et al., 2018). Researchers such as Valle et al. (2006) have called for further studies to explore the interaction between hope and different life experiences in order to fully understand hope as a psychological strength. Jiang and colleagues (2018) call for action to further investigate the role of hope not only in youth mental health but the mental health of specific adolescent populations such as those with co-occurring mental health and learning challenges.

Understanding how youth cultivated and were supported to infuse hope in different contexts can inform our ideas of how to foster good mental health across multiple processes and systems. For this reason, exploring hope has been prioritized in this research. In particular, it will be of importance to explore in this research the relationship between parents' and children's hope and different multisystemic influences operating to influence youths' development and well-being. In times of uncertainty and adversity, such as that of a global health pandemic, hope can act as buffer to protect against negative outcomes including poor mental health.

Resilience and Family

While sparse, systematic reviews centered on resilience and youth have highlighted key factors linked to positive adaptation in the face of adversity exposure such as close relationships, psychological skills and capacities, and community-based supports (Gartland et al., 2019; Masten, 2014b; Masten, et al., 2015; Meng et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2013). One of the most empirically supported ways to foster resilience and promote good mental health in youth is to support good family functioning and care (Masten et al., 2015; Walsh, 2006). Nested in the relational developmental system, the family itself is understood as a developing system that can show health, competence, vulnerabilities, and resilience (Masten, 2014a). In the face of adversity, positive parenting and family functioning may act as a buffer, protecting children's mental health and development (Masten et al., 2015; Walsh, 2006). No single model of health functioning fits all families or their situations, thus functioning must be assessed in context, relative to family structure, values, culture, relational resources, and life challenges. Optimal family functioning and well-being varies over time as challenges emerge and children develop, and families evolve. There is no typology of traits of a "resilience family" rather, there are mutually interactive dynamic processes involving strengths and resources that members can

mobilize within their family system and in transaction with their social environment (Walsh, 2006).

According to Masten (2014a) “effective families” are “responsive, open, and flexible; connected to the community; active in problem solving; and providing age- appropriate autonomy to their children” (p. 203). A study conducted during the pandemic in May 2020 and November 2020 identified that exposure to family stressor factors (e.g., family stress and inequality of online homeschooling) were positively associated with the instability of negative emotions (e.g., tension and depression fluctuations) for youth (Green et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of a contextual and processual approach to mental health being taken up in this study.

Literature on resilience and the family highlights several adaptive processes that families nurture and facilitate in order to cultivate resilience and positive development in youth (Masten et al., 2015; Walsh, 2006). These include family cohesion (Walsh, 2006) and secure attachments (Bandura, 1997), meaning making and beliefs (Walsh, 2006), routines and rituals (Masten & Shaffer, 2006; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007; Walsh, 2006) and cultural traditions (Harkness & Super, 2020; Masten, 2014b; Ungar, 2012; Ungar et al., 2012). As contextual protective influences, family functioning, parent-child relationships, parent management skills and family cohesion are necessary to promoting youth well-being (Harris et al., 2019; Masten & Palmer, 2019; Meng et al., 2018). Research in the field of family and resilience is largely quantitative thus, my study’s qualitative approach supports a deeper understanding of how to strengthen families during adversity.

Positive parenting behaviors such as nurturing, warmth, listening, appreciation, pride, monitoring, knowledge of daily activities, friendship, behaviors, and establishing curfews have

commonly been found in the literature to act as crucial protective factors with adolescents with learning disabilities (Majorano et al., 2016). Youth reports of parental monitoring and support have been linked in the literature to positive outcomes under high-risk situations (Egeland et al., 1993). In summary, positive parenting behaviors function and influence youth positively in the development and promotion of well-being and resilience. Within the context of the pandemic and strenuous social distancing measures, it is essential to hear from youth how their families faired but also how resilience was fostered within their family relationships and interactions.

While research by Kim-Cohen and Turkewitz (2012) has drawn attention to the role of epigenetic influence on resilience in children, recent evidence has emphasized the importance of gene-environment interactions in relation to resilience and family (Masten et al., 2015). It was demonstrated by Fisher et al. (2006), who showed that effectively trained foster parents were able to normalize dysregulated stress systems of children who had been impacted biologically by adverse experiences. In considering the impact of family on resilience, a systematic review exploring factors that benefit youth mental health post adversity found six family level resilience factors to significantly reduce the risk of mental health concerns (Fritz et al., 2018). These included high family cohesion, positive family climate, immediate family support, extended family support, positive parenting, and parental involvement (Fritz et al., 2018). My qualitative approach will add explanation and depth to understanding these processes.

A study investigating the extent to which parent attachment relationships would predict resiliency amongst 245 (92 men, 153 women) young adults found that higher levels of resilience were predicted by higher levels of positive mother relationship, lower levels of negative father relationship, and higher levels of close attachment, providing evidence for the long-term effect of parent–child relationships during childhood (Kennison & Spooner, 2020). Kim and Cicchetti's

(2004) study examined the concurrent and longitudinal relations of mother-child relationship quality, self-esteem, social competence, and maladjustment among maltreated (n=206) and non-maltreated (n=139) school-aged children from low-income families. The results from this study supported the importance of secure mother-child relationship quality as it was found to be negatively related to internalizing symptomatology and externalizing symptomology with regards to self-esteem. Noting the predominant focus on the western ideal of family, and motherhood, these findings raised critical questions for me regarding the consideration for cultural social dimensions within resilience literature. Luthar (2006) exemplified the role of contrasting perceptions of styles of monitoring and regulating of youth behavior by parents, attributing difference to influenced by race, socioeconomic status, and geography. Shaped by social and environmental conditions, resilience is a context specific process, so what may be perceived as protective for one youth may not be for another.

Hope and Family. Hope is best understood as a learned construct in which children develop and mirror from their significant adult role models such as their teachers and parents. From this perspective, one could hypothesize that levels of hope in youth are correlated to those of their caregivers, but findings have been mixed in this area (Jiang et al., 2018). Hoy et al., (2012) and Westburg and Martin (2003) found non-significant associations between parents' and children's hope. This was contradicted in the findings associated with Portuguese students by Marques and Lopez (2014) who found a moderate positive association between the two. When exploring family cohesion and social support, Merkaš and Brajša-Žganec (2011) examined children (n=298) with high hope. When compared to children with low hope, those with higher hope reported greater support from others and higher levels of family cohesion (Merkaš & Brajša-Žganec, 2011). While the theory of hope suggests that it is learned over time throughout

the course of a child's life, empirical support for parental role in teaching components such as creating goals, pathway and agentic thinking remains mixed and further research is necessary (Snyder et al., 1997). My study will address this gap in the literature and contribute to better understanding the youth's contextual experiences of hope and resilience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resilience and School

Within broader communities are adaptive systems of collective efficacy, social cohesion, effective schools, and robust resources for health care, social services, and policy (Masten, 2014a). Common protective factors associated with resilience and systems have been described in resilience literature (Berkes & Ross, 2013). Social ecologies (e.g., family, neighborhoods, government, and cultural practices) are as influential as (individual) psychological aspects of development. Resilience is a process facilitated by families, schools, and communities (Masten, 2014a).

Understanding youth developmental potentials and assets is vital to promoting their mental health, overall well-being, and in turn academic and developmental success. The relation between good mental health and good school functioning is evident as was demonstrated in the systematic reviews of Aldridge and McChesney (2018) and McPherson et al. (2014). These reviews demonstrated the critical relationship between youth mental health and well-being and school environment. Positive relationships with both educators and peers, positive perceptions of school safety, and positive views of belonging and connectedness within the school environment were found to be associated with positive mental well-being (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). Further to this, those who attended schools with positive social environments demonstrated lower internalizing behaviors such as anxiety and depression (McPherson et al., 2014). Mental

health and well-being for youth has been significantly affected due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Findlay & Arim, 2020; Racine et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). While quantitative research has established that youth mental health has been impacted by the global pandemic, there is a paucity of qualitative research which is needed to be able to support youth right now as well as to reduce the long-term impact of this global crisis.

Schools as an ecology offer many ideal opportunities for supportive action in which resilience can be cultivated and individual strengths and assets of youth can be fostered. Resilience is not in the person or the context but in their connection and relation to each other. In times of change and stress, social support has been found to act as a fundamental academic resource for youth (Wang & Eccles, 2012). The loss of in person interactions gained from school resulted in the loss of many protective factors available through these means. Schools operate as mesosystemic interactions for youth in helping them navigate their own resources towards positive development (Ungar, 2012).

The literature has demonstrated how schools contribute to the process of resilience for youth (Doll & Cummings, 2008; Masten, 2014a; Theron, 2016) which has been further supplemented by findings highlighting the way in which schools facilitate access to social ecological resources, such as access to material resources, experiencing social justice, meaningful relationships, experiences of personal and collective agency, in order to promote resilience (Kumpulainen et al., 2016; Tatlow-Golden et al. 2015; Theron & Theron 2014). These findings are important to note, as it is not simply the existence of the school ecology that enacts a process of resilience for youth, but youths' ability to access multiple social ecological resources while at school (Hines et al., 2005). In exploring the role of the school environment, it must be

understood by a way of intentional interventions, approaches, and processes. Ungar et al. (2007) emphasized seven key social ecological resources (1) access to material resources; (2) access to supportive relationships; (3) development of a desirable personal identity; (4) experiences of power and control; (5) adherence to cultural traditions; (6) experiences of social justice; and (7) experiences of social cohesion with others-that schools can facilitate through a multisystemic coordinated approach to cultivate resilience across individual, relational, and contextual resources (Bierman et al. 2008; Webster-Stratton et al. 2008). As we navigate thus uncharted territory of COVID-19 it is essential that we question the complex multi-tiered role of schools within the context of an ecologically based inquiry. There is a need to explore how youth's individual differences respond and require different socio ecological resources and factors in order to promote resilience in times of adversity.

Hope and Schools. The application of hope and resilience promoting processes within the educational system creates opportunities for youth to enhance mental health and well-being amidst a global health pandemic. Infusing hope into schools can enhance youth well-being and educational support for students in K-12 educational settings by promoting mental health while focusing on educational strengths (Pedrotti, 2018). The link between hope, youth well-being, and academic achievement has been supported by the literature (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Marques et al., 2017; Pedrotti et al., 2008). Ciarrochi and colleagues (2007) found that hope is the strongest predictor of positive affect and academic achievement in children. Hope supports academic achievement both directly (as seen in correlations to grade point averages) and indirectly, through its relation to other characteristics that support positive academic outcomes, such as self-efficacy and optimism (Snyder et al., 2003). As a protective factor there is evidence to indicate hope's role in personal and social goal development (Chang, 1998; Kwon, 2000;

Snyder et al., 1999, 2000), academic performance (Gallup, 2009; Marques et al., 2009; Snyder, 2002), scholastic competence and dropout rates (McDermott et al., 2000; Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1999; Worrell & Hale, 2001), and career-development skills (Barnett, 2021; Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Super, 1980). The relationship between hope, youth well-being, and academic achievement has been demonstrated predominately by quantitative measures. While valuable, qualitative inquiry like mine is necessary to thoroughly uncover a meaningful ecological understanding of the processes and interactions that facilitate and nourish hope for youth while school and learning has been altered by the pandemic.

In Marques and colleagues (2017) meta-analysis of the relationship between hope and academic achievement (N=9250), it was found that hope was related to numerous positive outcomes that are influenced by educational experiences such as higher self-esteem, overall life satisfaction, and lower rates of behavior difficulties. Findings also reveal the role of hope in predicting academic based behaviors and outcomes in that it operated as a component of one's willingness to perform. Leeson and colleagues (2008) uncovered the impact of hope on student success and persistence in school in their three-year longitudinal study examining grades and positive thinking variables amongst high school students (n=639). It was found that hope, positive attributional style, and cognitive ability predicted higher grades (Leeson et al., 2008). The evidence for hope as an enhancing factor in youth well-being and educational success is clearly outlined in the literature and more qualitative research is needed meaningfully understand the processes and interactions that foster hope.

COVID-19 Health Pandemic and Youth Mental Health

Disasters have played a salient role in the origins and evolution of the research on resilience in children (Masten, 2014a). Studies on isolated catastrophes affecting children began

to document the effects of acute onset, unexpected mass-trauma events on children. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of many, and youth have not escaped the numerous pandemic-related mental health concerns and risks to well-being. Pandemic-related mental health risks for youth are accumulated by evolving social distancing measures, educational and social disruptions, strained systems of care such as families and mental health supports, socio-ecological impacts of the pandemic and environmental factors such as socio-demographics, and individual social networks and social support (Fegert et al., 2020). Close to half the world's students continue to be impacted by school closures and social distancing measures. By January 2022, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had reported 10,481,082 affected learners. Whether by partial or full closures, an average of two-thirds of in person learning has been lost by pandemic closures, resulting in impacted overall development and academic progression particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Morgan et al., 2019; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021). While youth have had to experience learning from new and unique hybrid approaches of delivery, their lives have been disrupted and this is an influential factor in considering youth mental health during the pandemic.

COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching

In contrast to experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances (Hodges et al., 2020). It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency has abated. The primary objective in these circumstances is not to re-create a robust

educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and reliably available during an emergency or crisis. When we understand ERT in this manner, we can start to divorce it from online learning.

Since the onset of the pandemic, researchers have found that youth experienced worsening mental health conditions (compared to other age groups) (Findlay & Arim, 2020). Cross sectional studies examining youth mental health and well-being prior to the pandemic and during the initial phase highlight the elevating rates of mental health concerns for young people (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Mental well-being is a "dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop to their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to the community" (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project, 2008, p. 45). Thus, it is necessary that youth perspectives be understood from the perspective of uncovering the processes necessary to facilitate and promote good mental health and well-being for all youth which my study aims to do.

The research relevant to this study is based on several cross-sectional pandemic data sets which have been dependent on retrospective recall approaches, non-representative samples, snowball sampling techniques, and the use of online questionnaires or symptom scales (Vaillancourt et al., 2021). To date, there remains no Canadian population-based longitudinal study of youth mental health and the pandemic. While current international and national longitudinal studies suggest a worsening of mental health in relation to the pandemic, more research using qualitative and mixed methods approaches is still necessary to understand the complexity of the role of the pandemic to youth well-being and resilience.

International Youth Mental Health and COVID-19

Data collected during the early phases of COVID-19 internationally suggested an increase in depressive and anxiety symptoms and a decline in mental health and well-being in youth (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). Just two weeks after the World Health Organization announced the onset of COVID-19, research began to emerge highlighting the detrimental impact on this age group (Liang et al., 2020). This initial international research indicated heightened rates of anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms in populations as young as six years old consistently, with rates increasing into older adolescence particularly with regards to depression (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). Between 30-40% of students aged 12 to 18 years old experienced some combination of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Zhou et al., 2020). Chinese researchers Liang et al., (2020) found older youth (21-30 years old) demonstrated symptoms of post-traumatic stress (14%). While there were many unknowns during this time, these findings indicate an instant increase in anxious and depressive symptoms during the commencement of COVID-19 and government-imposed emergency response systems.

An international longitudinal study of youth aged 9-18 years old (N=1339) by Barendse et al. (2021) sought to explore changes in depression and anxiety symptoms from before to during the first six months of the pandemic. Their findings indicated depression symptoms increased significantly (median increase= 28%) and anxiety symptoms remained stable in the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Europe during the initial stages of the pandemic, researchers explored the emotional well-being of Italian and Spanish children between 3 and 18 years old who were in quarantine as a measure imposed by governments. Parents reported on their children's emotional states and behaviors during quarantine (Orgiles et al., 2020). The most frequent symptoms were difficulty concentrating (76.6%), boredom (52%), irritability (39%),

restlessness (38.8%), nervousness (38%), feelings of loneliness (31.3%), uneasiness (30.4%), and worries (30.1%). Children of both countries spent less time doing physical activity and slept more hours during the quarantine. Furthermore, family coexistence during quarantine became more difficult, the situation was more serious, and the level of stress was higher. Additionally, parents tended to report more emotional problems in their children (Orgiles et al., 2020). Similar findings from Zhang et al., 2021 indicated heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms from students in grades 2 through 6 and linked them to reduced outdoor activities and social interactions (Zhang et al., 2021).

A systematic review found that 63 of the 83 included studies documented the negative impact of loneliness on the mental health of previously healthy children and adolescents (Loades et al., 2020). Preexisting mental health disorders, loneliness, and psychological suffering associated with remote learning have been found to be associated with youth suicidality during this period (Manzar et al., 2021). Findings offered reasonable belief that school closures and social distancing measures may position youth to feel increased feelings of loneliness and therefore increased mental health problems for children and youth who are already at higher risk for experiencing mental health concerns (Loades et al., 2020). In four major US regions, 14- to 17-year-olds perceived declines in friendship support, more conflicts with friends and family, depressive symptoms, and a lack of privacy and personal space (Rogers et al., 2021). Of a rapid systematic review of 80 studies, 63 demonstrated the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the mental health of previously reported health children and youth (n=51,576; mean age 15.3 years). Only a few months into the pandemic, international findings began to raise many questions about what long term impacts this global health pandemic would have on youth and their families.

Canadian Youth Mental Health and COVID-19

In Canada, 5.7 million children and youth attending elementary and secondary school have been impacted by pandemic related school closures (Statistics Canada, 2021). Similar to international findings of elevated anxiety, depression, stress symptoms and worsening youth mental health during the initial phase of the pandemic, Canadian youth data highlighted the ever-growing impact to well-being. A StatsCan survey data indicated a mental health decline between 2018 and 2020 which was particularly striking amongst youth ages 15 to 24 years old. This population saw a drop in self-reported mental health status from 62% reporting excellent or very good mental health in 2018 compared to 42% reported excellent or very good mental health during the pandemic (Findlay & Arim., 2020). A Canadian study of 184 youth at four different time points over the course of two years before the pandemic, and again during the pandemic, found that anxiety and depression scores were significantly higher than previous expected (De France et al., 2021). COVID-19's consequences beyond that of physical health, and unfortunate circumstances related to social distancing and isolation measures, housing instability, food insecurity, impacted employment and financial insecurity, and challenges with child and disproportionate caregiving all contributed to peoples worsening mental health (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

Parallel to their international counter parts, Canadian youth also experienced feelings associated with the uncertainty of the virus and its role on their day to day lives. Youth reported feeling "very or extremely concerned" about the impact of COVID-19 on the health of vulnerable people as was demonstrated by 87% of youth respondents, of which approximately 21% were very or extremely concerned about their own health (Arim et al., 2020). COVID-19-related concerns were highest amongst younger groups (ages 15-34), additionally, rates of

anxiety differed according to generational group with the highest rates of clinically significant anxiety and COVID-19 related concerns among younger groups such as millennials (El-Gabalawy & Sommer, 2021). Greater stress from social isolation, including both the cancellation of important events and the loss of in-person social interactions, has been strongly associated with mental health deterioration (Cost et al., 2021). These findings illuminate the importance of considering general differences when investigating youth's experiences within this profound global pandemic. Not unlike the physical health consequences, the pandemic reaffirmed how mental health and well-being are shaped by social determinants of health in Canada (Jenkins et al., 2021).

A Canadian large cross-sectional study of children and youth (age 6–18 years for parent reports and 10–18 years for self-reports) examined the impact of COVID-19 emergency measures on child/adolescent mental health for children/adolescents with and without pre-existing psychiatric diagnoses. Findings indicated that a large majority of children and youth experienced harm to their mental health during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cost et al., 2021). While 67%–70% of children and youth experienced deterioration in at least one mental health domain, it was interesting to note that 19-31% experienced improvement in at least one domain (Cost et al., 2021). These findings speak to the need further explore the context in which improvements and resilience occurred and what lessons and revelations about key adaptive processes can and could be useful, particularly within the context of noteworthy adversity such as the COVID-19 health pandemic. Our inquiry needs to be centered on what helped and supported youth to do well and thrive during these unpresented conditions, as a way of informing future positive youth development and resilience interventions. While mental health deterioration was prevalent for those with and without preexisting diagnosis, rates of

deterioration were higher in those with a pre-exiting diagnosis (Cost et al., 2021). Similarly, Hawke et al. (2020) found a total of 68.4% of Canadian youth in their clinical sample and 39.9% in their community sample that met screening criteria for an internalizing disorder. Critical attention needs to be drawn to those who are already disproportionately impacted by mental health or disability, income, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender to be able to capitalize on the ability to power up their capacity for adaptation under these challenging conditions.

While many international and Canadian studies on mental health are exposing the impact of COVID-19 on mental health from a psychiatric and clinical standpoint, it is necessary that COVID-19's impact also be understood from the voices and experiences of youth directly. Recently released crowdsourced data of Canadian youth supports these findings, exposing a decline of perceived mental health during the pandemic, with over half (57%) of participants aged 15 to 17 reporting that their mental health was somewhat worse or much worse than it was prior to the implementation of physical distancing measures (Statistics Canada Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, 2019). In the largest and most detailed nation-wide COVID-19 survey to-date among the 12–17-year-old population in Canada, 72 % of girls reported feeling sad often or sometimes since the outbreak, and 55% of boys reported the same. Those 15-17 years old showed higher levels of outbreak-related sadness, with 72% reporting sadness often or sometimes versus 59 % of those aged 12 to 14. A large majority of respondents reported feelings of happiness "often or sometimes" since the outbreak began, 89% for 12- to 14-year-olds and 84% for 15- to 17-year-olds (Association for Canadian Studies, 2020). These findings offer a glimpse into the COVID-19 impact to youth, but they overlook the value of capturing the experiences from the voices of the youth themselves. As researcher, I want to know what life was like for these 72% of girls and 55% of boys who felt sad, what and how this was

experienced, what did youth have to say about what was helpful and what they needed during these unique times.

The emerging Canadian literature on youth experiences has highlighted themes of boredom, worry, and sadness amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and imposed remote learning. This was the case in the findings of two cross-sectional studies conducted in the spring of 2020 and the fall of 2020 on over 2000 children and youth aged 9–16 years (Vaillancourt et al., 2021). Elevated feelings of boredom (34%), worry (27%), and sadness (15%) during the pandemic were noted. Similar trends were reported amongst Canadians ages 12-24 years old (n=137) between April 2020 and June 2020. The main challenges found for participants included feeling isolated and lonely (48%), followed by closures of in-person schools and moving to remote learning (33%) (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021). A study executed by Angus Reid Institute (2020) canvassed children aged 10 to 17 years across the country about their thoughts, expectations, and concerns. The most reported feeling amongst the youth was “bored” (71%). Furthermore, older youth (16–17-year-olds) were twice as likely as their younger counterparts to report feeling “lonely” or “angry”. When considering the theoretical framework that guides this research study, there is an obvious tension between what we know to be beneficial for youth when they are embedded in relationships, contexts, and ecologies that nurture their development and what seems to have been taken from them during COVID-19 (Benson et al., 2006). The very nature of social distancing measures, shifts to emergency remote teaching, and isolation and quarantine periods contradicts what we know about how ecologies actively foster positive pathways for development processes and what youth need. Now more than ever, it is so important to create opportunities within systems like academia to meaningfully engage and amplify youth’s voices about their experiences and opinions.

Vulnerable Youth Mental Health and COVID-19

Broader literature suggests that COVID-19 will have a greater adverse effect on those experiencing other health, social, and structural inequities related to gender, sexual orientation, and mental health and disability status (Douglas et al., 2020). These vulnerabilities often intersect, contributing to compounding inequities and risk. Young refugees, youth living in rural areas, Indigenous, racialized people and ethnic minority youth, young persons with disabilities, and young people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are at greater risk of the pandemic and its impacts (United Nations, n.d.).

As highlighted by Canadian scholar Carl James (2020), "the pandemic has not only added to the social and educational inequalities among young people, but it has also exacerbated the racial injustice with which racialized and Indigenous youth must content" (p. 1). Like physical health, mental health and the consequences of poor mental health are often influenced by social determinants of health as is seen in racialized, Indigenous and impoverished communities (Laurencin & McClinton, 2020; Poteat et al., 2020). Multiracial youth of "low socioeconomic status, migration background and limited living space" under lock down restrictions were most negatively impacted (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2022). While emergency school closures could have been anticipated to impact many children and youth, those from low-income households were particularly susceptible to the adverse effects that economic inequality posed in their access to things such as stable internet and electronic devices necessary to continue with remote learning (Korczak et al., 2022). This innate response to shit to emergency remote teaching during initial pandemic lock downs was systematically oppressive and inequitable.

Consistent with these findings a Canadian study of children and youth (age 6–18 years for parent reports and 10–18 years for self-reports), found the rates of deterioration were greatest

for those with a pre-existing diagnosis and among children who perceived greater stress from being socially isolated (Cost et al., 2021). This decline was also noted in other studies of youth with neurodevelopmental conditions (Sciberras et al., 2022; Theis et al., 2021), those with pre-existing mental health problems, as well as other pre-existing vulnerabilities like physical health problems (Hawke et al., 2020), and those living in adverse socio-economic circumstances (Whitehead et al., 2021) and in racialized communities (Ezell et al., 2021).

While sparse, there have been some cross-sectional findings to indicate that the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the mental health of neurodivergent learners such as those with the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other special educational needs and disabilities (Asbury et al., 2020; Asbury & Toseeb, 2023; Banerjee et al., 2020; Nonweiler et al., 2020). Common themes of experiencing loss, worry and changes in mood, emotion, and behavior because of the rapid social changes that occurred were present amongst this population (Asbury et al., 2020). The notion of *not knowing what was going on* was expressed by some to be a point of distress for children and an exasperating factor in challenging behavior, thus findings were indicative of better understandings being associated with better outcomes.

Among Canadians aged 15- to 24-years-old, a mental health-related disability has the highest rate of co-occurrence with learning disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2012). Children and adolescents with identified neurodevelopmental disorders, are at higher risk for mental health concerns (Wilson et al., 2009). These learning and behavioral disabilities are most encountered in an educational context, encompassing the largest proportion of disability categories in schools. The literature highlights a critical relationship between those of marginalized populations and their exposure to differences in power, gender role dynamics, racism, oppression and health

disparities and the impact on ongoing experiences of shame and isolation felt by these populations posing greater risk of psychological and emotional harm (Comstock et al., 2008). Current qualitative research that captures multiple perspectives on youth mental health in educational contexts is lacking. In an attempt to contribute to this gap in the literature, my study will explore the experiences of youth who self-identify as having co-occurring learning and mental health difficulties.

Educational disruptions and COVID-19

Concerns about school-related challenges for youth is emerging in the current research as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds. Interruptions such as emergency remote teaching may lead to the disengagement of youth learners as was found in an Italian study of students. In the study, 28% of students reported knowing at least one classmate who was no longer attending school (Save the Children, 2021). We know that for those who are experiencing mental health concerns their potential of leaving school earlier is even greater making the COVID-19 imposed home learning protocols significant factors is negative outcomes for youth. A single qualitative study of American youth found that participants' greatest challenge during the pandemic was related to academic work habits such as school motivation and time management (Scott et al., 2021). This was mirrored in the findings of Angus Reid Institute (2020) with 75% of their youth participants reporting 60% feeling unmotivated, 57% disliking their learning arrangements and 29% reporting feeling worried about missing school (Angus Reid Institute, 2020). Similarly, a study exploring Canadian high school students found that 72% were "very much worried" about how COVID-19 would impact their school year (Ellis et al., 2020).

Lessard and Puhl's (2021) study captured the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic related worries and motivation amongst a sample of 452 youth in the USA

(Mage=14.9, SDage=2.1). Finding that worries such as “not being able to motivate yourself to do schoolwork,” and “not being able to focus on schoolwork” were common. In this same sample 69% reported a decrease in communication with their teachers since the beginning of the pandemic particularly in the case of middle school aged students (76%) followed by high school students (64%). Worries of poorer learning and academic outcomes also contributed to elevated reports of anxiety alongside academic worries associated with their future (college transitions) for older youth (Cohen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2021). A nationally representative sample of Italian youth also found similar patterns of academic related worries during the pandemic further highlighting the increased worry about the negative consequences to their learning (Buzzi et al., 2020). Interesting to note in these instances when youth are reporting increased worry or concern about the future of their academics, they are in most cases still involved remotely in school. This raises many questions regarding the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of emergency remote teaching approaches and the need to adapt in these times of change. These findings highlight the academic worries related to the COVID-19 pandemic for youth and also their perceptions of changes to their relationships and the need to better understand youth’s experiences as the navigate and manage these COVID-19 consequences.

Furthermore, these findings were of particular interest to me as often the rhetoric surrounding youth is that they do not care about school. These types of narratives discount the role that schools play in youth’s day-to-day lives and well-being, and it raises the question of how the school ecology itself will adapt in the face of adversity. While my study’s primary focus is on youth at the center of a system of bidirectional influences which influence their development there is a body of work that prioritizes the study of community/cultural resilience that is worthy of exploration (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Healy,

2006). Understanding schools as a community or culture may posit as beneficial when conceptualizing how these systems adapted or absorbed the adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences and lessons that followed.

Resilience and COVID-19

While evidence quickly began to emerge of elevated levels of mental health problems in youth during the pandemic so did individual and collective adaptive systems and processes that engage networks at multiple levels to facilitate resilience and positive development for youth during this time. Levels of knowledge, and the prevention measures for COVID-19 were found to buffer against negative mental effects (including online learning, knowledge about the virus, and smart phone based psychological interventions) (Zhou et al., 2020). Open communication between children and parents was also found to be an important mediating factor (Tang et al., 2021). Youth wanted to know what was happening and what that meant for them and their future. This meant being informed about research-based information regarding the virus, its transmissibility, and science-based preventions and protection efforts. Pozzoli et al. (2022) found significant negative associations between students' difficulties in online classes and both positive home climate and higher perceived teacher closeness amongst 181 Italian middle school students (97 girls and 86 boys; Mage=11 years, 9 months; SDage=8 months; range: 11–14 years) before (November 2019) and during pandemic closures (May 2020). These findings contribute to the social ecological understanding of the role of individual and environmental interactions particularly in the case of family and school factors. Pozzoli et al. (2022) argue that conceptualizing the pandemic and youth mental well-being and learning from a transactional framework emphasize the role of supportive, regulated, relationships at the familial and academic levels in order to promote both academic and social emotional well-being. These

findings are also mirrored in the work of Wright and Wachs (2022), who explored the moderating effect of perceived teacher support during the self-isolation portion of the pandemic April 2020 and May 2020) (N=46751% female; Mage=13.47; ages range from 12 to15 years old from USA). It was found that greater perceived teacher support was a buffer against negative health outcomes during the imposed home learning highlighting the role of schools and teachers in mitigating the negative mental health outcomes of youth during these times (Wright & Wachs, 2022).

A survey of youth ages 14-27 years old found nearly half of youth with existing mental health challenges and 40% of those who have never sought mental health treatment had experienced improved self-reflection and self-care during the pandemic (Korczak et al., 2022). Similarly, Cost et al. (2021) found the mental health of some improved (19%–31%) during COVID-19. Benefits such as spending more time with family, a decline in reported substance use, having less stress from school and more time to plan future goals, and engaging in hobbies and relaxation activities have been identified in the emerging COVID-19 literature (Korczak et al., 2022).

The Association for Canadian Studies (2020) in partnership with Experiences Canada and the Vanier Institute of the Family have also reported that a majority of youth have experienced feelings of happiness throughout the pandemic. For example, 90% of 12- to 14-year-olds and 84% of 15- to 17-year-olds have reported being happy often or sometimes. Also, 83% of youth aged 12–14 years and 75% of youth aged 15–17 years reported having more meaningful conversations with others throughout the pandemic. Likewise, in the 2020 Statistics Canada report, youth (15-30 years old) reported several positive health behaviors such as communicating

with friends and families (90%), exercising indoors (66%), and outdoors (62%), with young women reporting higher rates of such (Arim et al., 2020).

These findings strengthen the understanding of the role of social support and connection in student learning and well-being (Bru et al., 2010; DuBois et al., 1992; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wentzel et al., 2010). As stated by Herbers et al. (2021), "resilience occurs when children and their contexts can adapt to adversity, resulting in positive development" (p. 423). By way of person-context multisystem transactions (family, school, and community) youth can adapt and persevere in the face of novel adversity. Understanding how and why these "adaptive systems" and multilevel factors that contribute to resilience is key to supporting youth positive development (Masten, 2014a). Simply existing as a system in which youth exist is not enough for positive youth development let alone the tremendous change and adversity brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical that we understand what these multi-level interactions actually do and how they do it in order to enact processes that allot youth the opportunity to act upon or develop resilience processes in the face of turmoil.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two provided a literature review of youth mental health and well-being by reviewing the current scholarly landscape of prevalence and contributing resilience factors. Furthermore, the review examined the prominent emphasis in the ecological perspective of the analysis of contextual factors such as family, school, and multi-level resources when youth are faced with adversity. The current scope of literature reflects a predominantly quantitative dominated field. While this research provides valuable information about youth's mental health experiences, it is restricted by numerical representation and quantitative nature, and further research such as this study needs to be prioritized in order to compliment what we know about

what is happening for youth. At the end of this literature review I summarized the emerging research on youth mental health and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Next, I turn to Chapter Three to describe my methodology and provide a description of my qualitative case study and its purpose to explore youth mental health and well-being among youth in Manitoba during the COVID-19 health pandemic.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Qualitative Research

A case study approach was deemed best suited for my thesis because in times of an unprecedented phenomenon such as the COVID-19 pandemic it is imperative that we explore how youth with learning and mental health concerns navigated the COVID-19 pandemic beyond that of quantitative methods, to gain descriptive and contextualized understandings. In-depth and using multiple forms of data, this qualitative study focuses on the experiences of four youth aged 12 to 17 years old living in Manitoba, Canada, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Divan et al. (2017) and Creswell (2012) note that there is a widespread uptake of qualitative methods in both counselling and educational research. Qualitative research allows for in-depth analysis of complex systems and experiences which cannot be fully captured with measurement scales and multivariate models (Plano Clark et al., 2008). It is best suited to address a research problem in which the desired understandings are yet unknown, using words and pictures rather than numerical depictions (Creswell, 2012; Zabkiewicz & Bassil, 2014). It is worth quoting Creswell (2012)—a leading proponent in qualitative research—at length about its complexity and layers. Creswell states:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning of individuals and groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher,

> a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change (p. 44).

Situated within the Relational Developmental Systems framework which guides the adoption of conceptual models Positive Youth Development and the Social Ecological Resilience, this study embraced a qualitative approach to answering the questions of what, how, and why. My theoretical framework operated as a driver in my use of qualitative research informing my methodological approach, choices, and actions. Particularly during the initial stage of the pandemic, scholarly research was inundated by quantitative studies that highlighted ever growing prevalence of worsening experiences for youth. Qualitative research is necessary to understand these experiences and prevalence, during this complex phenomenon.

Case Study

To answer the stated research questions (see below), an exploratory holistic case design was employed. An exploratory holistic case design is described by Yin (2018) as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 15). This research explored the case of youth learning and mental health of those with co-occurring difficulties within the context of two different time periods of the COVID-19 pandemic while schools were significantly impacted by public health protocols. Creswell (2002) describes a case study as "a problem to be studied, which will reveal an in-depth understanding of a "case" or bounded system, which involves understanding an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 61). This method of exploration is best suited to exploring how youth with learning and mental health concerns fared during the COVID-19 pandemic for many reasons, the first of which is the unique and unprecedented nature of the

global pandemic and the need to understand the experiences of youth to best support their resilience. As Yin (2003) states, "…the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 2). Never before have schools, families, and youth had to adapt to an unprecedented global shift. Understanding complex social and contextual phenomena and the feelings and impressions of participants is inherently qualitative (Zabkiewicz & Bassil, 2014).

Understanding the contextual conditions of the phenomena at hand is also quintessential to case study research. As described by Thomas (2016), "your case study is defined not so much by the methods that you are using to do the study, but the edges you put around the case" (p. 21). In the current research, the case is the phenomenon of educational and mental health experiences for youth with both learning and mental health concerns during COVID-19 when schools were remote or restricted due to public health protocols that aimed to reduce the spread of COVID-19 virus in Manitoba, Canada, during the first year of the pandemic. Yin (2018) affirms that "case studies allow you to focus in-depth on a 'case' and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective" (p. 5).

In the process of deeming if this design was appropriate for this study, I considered whether the case at hand met Yin's (2018) five criterion for determination, which included asking if was critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal in nature. As we shall see, exploring time intervals that highlight the development of the phenomena over an extended period of time will reveal the effects over time. In my research, I interviewed participants at two different time intervals in the pandemic, initially in May 2020 followed up in May 2021, in order to further explore the progression and impact of the phenomena at hand.

Representing the in-depth descriptions of the complex adaptive systems and processes that engage networks of systems at multiple levels to facilitate youth resilience and positive development is critical during these times. This phenomenon is necessary to explore as never before have schools operated in a forced emergency remote capacity. While youth with mental health and learning concerns attempted to navigate the nuances of emergency remote learning, many were also in a position to be at a higher risk for adverse mental health experiences during the pandemic (Findlay & Arim, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2021).

Research Questions

The overarching research question of the current research is: "How were youth with learning and mental health concerns in Manitoba experiencing the COVID-19 health pandemic at two different time periods while schools were significantly impacted by public health protocols?" My sub questions included:

1. What did youth say about or describe as supportive systems and adaptive capacities within the child, in relationships with caregivers, families, or friends, and in resources and capacities provided by families, schools, and community supported youth during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. What did youth say about how their families faired during the COVID-19 health pandemic while schools were conducting emergency remote instruction?

3. What was the youth perspective about key processes related to family resilience?

4. What did parents or caregivers notice about key processes that supported their youth during emergency remote instruction?

5. What key adaptive systems/processes fostered positive mental health and resilience during the COVID-19 health pandemic while schools were conducting emergency remote instruction?

6. What does hope mean for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Design

The current research is embedded within a larger project titled, “In-Depth Case Studies of Families and Teachers Exploring the Co-Occurrence of Youth Learning and Mental Health Concerns” led by researcher and psychologist, Breanna Lawrence. The study was designed to gain detailed information and insight into the everyday experiences of youth with learning and mental health concerns during COVID-19 with youth, their parents or guardians, their educators and later their siblings. My current research is focused on the sub-sample of youth (n=4) that were interviewed initially in May 2020 and followed up in May 2021, and their parents (n=4) for a total of 16 interviews. The descriptive case approach entailed separate interviews with both the youth and their parent, to gain an in-depth understanding of what it was like for youth during two different time points in the COVID-19 health pandemic.

Procedures

After institutional human research ethics approval which outlined my involvement as a research assistant within the above noted larger project, participants were recruited via word of mouth and social media where recruitment posters were advertised, highlighting the nature of the research and the participation criteria in the spring of 2020 (see Appendix A). Participants were invited from Manitoba and both rural and urban centers were included in recruitment. Those who were interested contacted the researcher directly. Initially nine youth and their nine parents were interviewed in May 2020.

Before the interview, parents and/or guardians confirmed the participation criteria and were informed of the purpose of the study and what would be asked of both their children and themselves in the interviews. Verbal consent was obtained prior to the audio recording of the interview and when possible, written (scanned or electronic signature). Following public health and the Brandon University guidelines, all interviews were held over the phone or video conference. These interviews typically lasted between 45-90 minutes and were audio-recorded. Participants were thanked with an emailed $20 e-gift card.

At the end of the initial interview, participants provided consent to be contacted for a follow up interview invitation in Spring of 2021. Consenting participants were contacted for a follow up interview invitation. At this time, four youth participants and their parents were reinterviewed in the same manner. Those four youth participant interviews alongside their four parent interviews constitute the focus of this research. This is a way of further exploring family experiences and resilience processes from a multi-informant perspective for youth with learning and mental health concerns and better understanding youth's experiences within the context of imposed remote learning and the COVID-19 health pandemic.

Participants

To gain an in-depth understanding about what it was like for youth, purposive sampling (Creswell & Plano, 2011) was used to select participants based on preselected criteria of self-identified learning and mental health concerns in youth ages 12-17 years old. This method of non-probability sampling is based on the premise that participants are selected based on specific identified inclusion criteria (Creswell & Plano, 2011). Adopting a purposive sampling method allowed me to select participants based on their unique experience as youth with co-occurring learning and mental health concerns within the COVID-19 health pandemic. Recent research

anticipates that COVID-19 will have a greater adverse effect on those experiencing other health, social, and structural inequities related to gender, sexual orientation, mental health, and disability status, for example (Douglas et al., 2020) Those in educational settings are seeing increasing rates of mental health concerns and learning and behavioral disabilities (Blomqvist et al., 2019; Bor et al., 2014; Collishaw, 2015; Pitchforth et al., 2019; Splett & Maras, 2011). Thus, in this context of uuncertainty and unprecedented conditions, it is critical that we explore with intention to understand and support the needs of these youth in order to foster positive development and resilience.

The focus of the current research is on the four youth participants interviewed at two different points in time, about one year apart, and their parents who were also interviewed in a separate interview. Initially interviewed in Spring 2020, the youth participants included: Y01 16-year-old boy, Y03 13-year-old girl, Y04 14-year-old girl, Y05 12-year-old girl. To gain a better understanding of youth's experiences, parents or caregivers were also interviewed in order to capture parent perspectives of youth's experiences and family context. One of the four families identified as Indigenous, two of the families identified as single parent homes while the other two identified as two parent households. All interviewed parents were employed, two full-time and two part time (see Table 1).

A total of 16 interviews were conducted related to the four youth participants.

Table 1

Youth Participant Demographics During Spring 2020 Interviews

	Age	Gender	Indigenous	Type of Home
Y01	16	Boy	No	2 Parent
Y03	13	Girl	Yes	1 Parent
Y04	14	Girl	No	2 Homes
Y05	12	Girl	No	2 Parent

Table 2

Parent Participant Demographics During Spring 2020 Interviews

	Gender	Indigenous	Marital Status	Employment
P01	Woman	No	Married	FT
P03	Woman	Yes	Divorced	PT
P04	Woman	No	Divorced	PT
P05	Man	No	Married	FT

COVID-19 Health Pandemic Context

This study describes resilience processes related to navigating remote learning at two different points in time (May 2020 and May 2021), during a novel and unparalleled time in history. It is necessary to contextualize this phenomenon within time and place as a means of enhancing credibility in the research process and uncovering meaning and richness in the voices of the youth (Rousseau & Fried, 2001). The following timeline outlines information relevant to the participants as they were situated within a Manitoban context, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020

On January 25, 2020, the first Canadian Coronavirus case was reported by Health Canada. By January 30, 2020, The World Health Organization had declared a Public Health Emergency of international concern and by March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic as cases began to rise globally. By March 12, 2020, three cases had been reported in Manitoba. By the end of March, every Canadian province and territory had declared a state of emergency and restrictions were tightening by the day. Twelve of Canada's 13 provinces and territories had confirmed cases and limitations on gatherings of people ranged from 50 (British Columbia) to zero (Quebec, in any places outside homes, workplaces or retailers).

The province of Manitoba declared a provincial state of emergency on March 20, 2020. The provincial government proceeded to implement numerous public health and safety measures which included travel restrictions for people travelling both within and outside of the province, limitations on the number of people attending public gatherings, and the determination of essential businesses that were required to remain operational during the shutdown.

During this time, classroom learning remained suspended, and on June 1, 2020, access to school facilities was granted for teachers conducting student assessments in small groups and for students requiring access to the internet, computers, and counselling services.

Manitoba school closures persisted from March 23-May 31, 2020. In accordance with provincial health restrictions and specific planning and programming needs, Manitoba began the development of *The Restoring Safe Schools* document and released it to the public on June 25, 2020. The plan outlined the provincial framework for resuming in class learning following the suspension of in school learning. With provincial consistency, local flexibility, and public health and safety in mind the guidelines sought to ensure and plan for consistency with the province's *Restoring Safe Services Manitoba's Pandemic and Economic Roadmap for Recovery* plan.

On July 31, 2020, the province released the *Welcoming Our Students Back: Restoring Safe Schools* plan, which provided a set of guidelines that would ensure the preservation of public health and safety following the resumption of in-person classes on September 8, 2020. The plan included an outline of *K-12 Guidelines for September 2020, a Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Students and a School Settings Practice Guidance and Protocols* document. August 19 marked the announcement of the *RestartMB* response system based on regional risk categorization, placing Manitoba in its entirety under the yellow "caution" tier. By August 20, the Prairie Mountain Health Region became the first region under the orange "restricted" code,

limiting the region to mandatory face masks in public and at gatherings, which were restricted to 10 people.

On September 9, it was announced that a student in grade seven at Churchill Highschool in Winnipeg was identified as the first student to test positive for the virus. By mid-September, many schools and regions were shifted to higher tier restrictions on the response system, responding to increasing case numbers and positive cases, and widespread community transmissions. By October 2, 2020, the Provincial Education Minister suspended grade 12 provincial exams for the first year, as a way to mitigate the impact of accessibility to remote learning. On October 22, 2020, the Northern Health Region was placed under the same restrictions as Winnipeg Metropolitan, where schools were faced with further restrictions.

November 3, 2020, Winnipeg shifted to the critical red tier and the rest of Manitoba was assigned the restricted orange tier, limiting community retail services and establishment capacities. On November 11, 2020, a record of 431 new cases were reported, with 218 people in hospital and a record of 533 tests being performed the day prior. By November 12, the entire province was moved to critical/red on the response system, resulting in mass closures of all non-critical businesses, prohibition of cultural and social gatherings, and limited contact to one household only, while K-12 schools throughout the province remained opened to in person learning. A day later, on November 13, 2020, Manitoba surpassed 10,000 COVID-19 cases with a test positive rate provincially of 12.2%. By mid-November, the Premier was hinting that the possibility of an extended Christmas break for students was on the horizon. On November 19, 2020, a total of 12,482 cases of the virus had been reported in the province, driving health officials to implement tighter restrictions for gatherings, prohibiting people from gathering in private residences, and limiting outdoor and public space contact to five people. By the following

day, non-essential items were prohibited from being sold in person in the province. A new record daily high was set of 543 new cases in the province on November 23, 2020. The Hanover School Division and surrounding schools shifted to code red on November 24, resulting in full time remote learning. On November 28, 2020, the youngest person to die of the virus in the province died at 10 years old. 543 new cases were announced on November 23, 2020, marking it as the highest single day spike to date and bringing Manitoba's total to 14,087 cases. On November 28, 2020, it was announced that a boy under the age of 10 died due to COVID-19 making him the youngest to die of the virus so far and 487 new cases were reported with a provincial test positivity rate of 14.2 %. With 247 deaths in November alone totaling approximately 80% of the total deaths in Manitoba, the month came to a close at a provincial test positivity rate of 13.4%.

On December 1, 2020, the death total reached 328 since the beginning of the pandemic and Manitoba recorded its deadliest day thus far, with 16 deaths and 9,066 actives cases. On December 5, 2020, another record was broken with 19 new deaths being announced alongside 354 new cases. On December 8, 2020, the Manitoba death count reached 420 and an additional 245 new cases were reported, bringing the total since the beginning of the pandemic to 19,376, with 5,379 still active. Premier Brian Pallister announced the extension of current restrictions until January 8, 2021. On December 9, the Premier announced the Pfizer vaccine had been approved by Health Canada and could be arriving in the province as early as the following week, with 900 frontline health care workers receiving the first doses. By December 11, 465 people had died of COVID-19 and new health orders were set to come into effect on the following Saturday in the city of Winnipeg, allowing outdoor community rinks and tobogganing hills to open. Manitoba administered its first Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine on December 16, 2020, as the five-day test positivity rate reached 13.6%. On December 21, 2020, Manitobans were urged to not gather

over the holidays as the death total climbed to 572 and 167 new cases were reported. On December 27,2020, there were 4,488 active cases with a test positivity rate of 12.1 % provincially and a total of 645 deaths since March 2020. By month end, December 31, 2020, Manitoba had reached a death total of 667. A total of 25,700 cases since the start of the pandemic, 4,505 which were active and a five-day test positive rate of 11.2%.

2021

As the new year set in, international travelers arriving in Winnipeg were asked to be tested immediately over fear of a new variant, as 118 new cases and five new deaths were announced on January 4, 2021. By January 5, 2021, 4,292 people had received the vaccine in Manitoba and first shipments of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine took route to First Nations in the province by January 7, 2021, as the total case count rose to 25,742. Code red health orders were extended to January 8, 2021, due to holiday gatherings and on January 11 Manitoba's top doctor reported more than 530 cases and 2,800 close contacts linked to holiday gatherings, contributing to a total of 3,414 active cases. On January 21, it was announced that new health orders would come into effect on January 23, continuing the order of code red critical level, with most changes in the areas of Winnipeg, Southern Health, Interlake-Eastern, and Prairie Mountain Health, but not the Northern Health Region and Churchill because of high COVID-19 case counts. The "rule of two" was also introduced allowing two designated people to visit inside homes. January 26, 2021, witnessed a death toll of 809 for Manitoba and the introduction of new health orders making it mandatory that anyone entering the province isolate for 14 days. The end of the month marked the release of Manitoba's vaccine priority list.

On February 9, 2021, the province announced its first case of the COVID-19 B-117 variant, also known as the U.K. Variant, which was discovered in relation to international travel.

It was announced on February 12, 2021, that businesses would be allowed to open at 25% capacity, outdoor sports facilities would be allowed to open for casual sports and organized practices and games, gyms and fitness centers could reopen at 25% capacity, and indoor sporting facilities could operate at 25%. On February 16, 2021, it was reported that there had been 30,932 cases since the start of the pandemic and 875 deaths. On February 24, 2021, it was announced that the vaccine would soon become available to the general public. Manitobans born on or before December 31, 1926, and First Nations people born on or before December 31, 1946, were now able to book priority appointments. On February 25, the province began to share details of a proposed reopening of the province, with loosening restrictions surrounding household gatherings, group fitness classes, and outdoor gatherings and business restrictions. The following day Health Canada approved the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine for use, as provincial eligibility criterion broadened, and provincial active cases reached 1,197.

March 1, 2021, marked the date that the first members of the general public received their vaccine in Manitoba. As the province recorded a total of 21,896 cases since the onset of the pandemic and 1,171 active cases it also released a report showing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on BIPOC communities in Manitoba. The following day, the province recorded its first case of the B.1.3.5.1 variant first recorded in South Africa. Loosening of restrictions was set to take place on March 5, 2021. The province announced that the AstraZeneca vaccine was to be given to high-risk people between the ages of 50 and 65 years old. To date, 84,937 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine had been administered, including 55,090 first doses and 29,847 second doses. On March 14, 2021, it was announced that there were 891 active cases, 30,935 recovered and a provincial five-day test positivity rate of 4.5%. On March 19, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the Canadian Armed Forces would help vaccinate 23 communities in

northern Manitoba. Three schools reported potential exposures to COVID-19 variants: Ecole Tache and O. V. Jewitt Elementary School in Winnipeg, and Pine Ridge Elementary School in Winkler. The province remained in the code red or critical level due to rising cases of COVID-19 variants of concern.

On April 7, 2021, the vaccine eligibility criteria continued to broaden, and Manitoba health officials announced small changes to current public health orders to begin on April 9. While 179 new cases were reported the province announced that it was in the beginning of the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of April 8, 259,847 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine had been administered in Manitoba. As the B.1.1.7 variant became the dominant variant in the province, 1,312 active cases of the virus were reported, bringing the total of confirmed lab cases to 35,213 and a death toll of 949. On April 15, 2021, the first case of the P1 variant of concern – first identified in Brazil – had been found in Manitoba in a person from Interlake-Eastern health region. On April 19, 2021, it was announced that people over 18 years old in high-risk areas would be eligible for the vaccine. In attempts to slow down the third wave of the pandemic, new public health orders took effect April 20, impacting gathering rules and business capacities. On April 21, 1,833 active cases and 33,838 recoveries since the beginning of the pandemic were reported with a provincial five-day test positivity rate of 6.3%. With active cases on the rise in the province, new health orders took effect on April 28, limiting gatherings by not permitting visitors in other's homes, indoors or outdoors, restricting public outdoor gatherings to 10 people, requiring mask wearing, etc., On April 27, an outbreak was declared at École Marie-Anne-Gaboury after 12 students and staff tested positive for COVID-19. The school switched to remote learning. As the month came to an end, Premier Brian Pallister announced that teachers and education workers in Manitoba would be able to receive a vaccine thanks to a partnership

with North Dakota. The vaccine location eligibility also expanded to include Inkster West and Fort Garry South in Winnipeg, Brandon East End, and Powerview/Pine Falls.

Indigenous adults living in Manitoba became eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine on May 3, two days following the general age eligibility provincially dropped to 45 years. On May 7, 2021, the province announced 502 new cases, bringing the provincial test positive rate to 9.6%, with 137 people in the hospital with active COVID-19. On May 9, 2021, the province announced schools in Winnipeg and Brandon would switch to remote learning and health officials reported 532 new COVID-19 cases. On May 12, students in Winnipeg and Brandon officially moved to remote learning with a growing test positivity rate of 12.1% and vaccine eligibility dropping to 18 years old. May 13 marked a new record for the number of newly announced COVID-19 cases, with 560 new cases. Manitobans 12 and older became eligible to book COVID-19 vaccine appointments for the Pfizer vaccine, with approximately 111,000 young people aged 12 to 17 in the province included in this group. This made Manitoba one of the first jurisdictions in the country to allow young people aged 12 to 17 years old to book their Pfizer vaccine appointment. All 27 schools in the Garden Valley and Red River Valley school districts made the switch to remote learning starting Tuesday, May 18, with students remaining at home until at least May 30. The province announced 51% of people over the age of 18 years old had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. On May 17, 2021, Manitoba took the top spot for COVID-19 infections in Canada and the U.S., reporting an average of 331.9 infections per million and by May 20 the province recorded 603 new cases—the highest single-day spike of COVID-19 cases yet in the pandemic—bringing Manitoba's total to 46,916 which included 4,659 active cases and 41,238 recoveries.

On May 22, another round of restrictions were put in place for the holiday weekend as Manitoba continued to try to lower the COVID-19 case count. These measures included no gatherings outdoors with people from a different household, including at recreation areas, golf courses, and parks. Contacts were to be limited to households only and only one person per household was to be allowed to go into a business, with exceptions such as caregivers helping those they are caring for. On May 21, 2021, Manitoba reported its second-highest spike in daily COVID-19 cases, with 594 new cases. All schools in Dauphin transitioned to remote learning on May 26 due to an increase in COVID-19 cases in the area. By May 27, the province announced that all students in Winnipeg, Brandon, the Red River Valley, and Garden Valley school divisions would continue with remote learning until at least June 7. On May 28, there were 4,676 active cases of the virus in Manitoba, 44,426 people who had recovered, and 1,042 who had died.

As the province reached 51,935 cases since March 2020, it was announced on June 3 that many schools in Manitoba would remain in remote learning until the end of the school year. With 333 Manitobans with COVID-19 being treated in hospitals on June 5, 39 patients were also being treated outside of the province: 36 in Ontario, one in Saskatchewan and two in Alberta. On June 9, it was announced that a teenage boy from Winnipeg had died from COVID-19, bringing the number of people who had died from COVID-19 in Manitoba to 1,081. On June 10, the province announced a reopening plan based on immunization levels. On June 12, public health orders were adjusted slightly to allow for people to gather in limited groups on public and private property. On June 14, 2021, the Province of Manitoba recorded its lowest daily COVID-19 case count since mid-April, with 124 COVID-19 cases and vaccine eligibility for second doses being

expanded to people who had received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine on or before May 10, 2021.

This Manitoba focused overview of the COVID-19 health pandemic from January 15, 2020- June 14, 2021, contextualizes the phenomenon experienced by the youth during their first and second interviews. Highlighting information relevant to the participants during this time provides a time and a place in which the youth experienced the many shifts and changes of the pandemic. While the above timeline captures this unique period of the first wave of the pandemic, it is important to note that the pandemic and health measures continued to evolve beyond the timeline outlined by this study. Thus, results should be considered within the contextualized limits and boundaries of this phenomenon and case.

Interview Method

Commonly found in case study research, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted to illicit participants' insight into the meaning of their experiences within the phenomena (Yin, 2018). Interview questions followed the structure of pre-determined interview questions in a flexible and conversational manner to explore what it was like for youth during two different time periods of the COVID-19 health pandemic (see Appendix B). Parents were prompted to describe the impact of learning and emotional challenges in their children's daily lives from their perspective, as well as supportive influences throughout the COVID-19 health pandemic and emergency remote learning (see Appendix C).

In a conscious effort toward ensuring a reflexive process and reflecting on my role creating and delivering the findings of the participants within this research, I employed several strategies in reflecting on my own praxis (Dodgson, 2019). In preparation for the interview process, it was critical for me to reflect on the idea of transparency and trustworthiness as pivotal

to quality research (Buetow, 2019). Interviewing participants twice (prolonged engagement) and succinctly identifying and recording my research process through a research journal held me accountable to the "process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of [my] positionality" as described by Berger (2013, p. 220).

Data Analysis

Data analysis of this study involved two phases: within-case analysis and across-case analysis. First the interviews were transcribed using an established transcription process developed by Lawrence and Herron (www.centreforruralmentalhealth.com/events). The transcripts were stripped of any identifying information and assigned a participant code and uploaded to NVivo.

Case propositions informed the inquiry of this research and were derived by this study's theoretical framework, relevant literature, and the research questions (Yin, 2018). Across overarching case propositions five themes were identified: (a) COVID19 learning (b) COVID-19 mental health (c) youth interpersonal competencies, (d) COVID-19 family dynamics, & (e) adaptive systems and processes. There were also more specific sub themes associated with each overarching proposition (see Table 3).

Next, in sequence, each youth's and their parents' initial interviews were coded using an NVivo Coding method (Saldaña, 2003) followed by their follow up interviews. Descriptive coding, also referred to as Topic Coding, was employed by identifying a topic and summarizing using a word or short phrase of the participant's actual accounts to draw out themes within the data (Saldaña, 2003; Strauss, 1987; Wolcott, 1994). The process of coding and sorting has been referred to as decontextualizing by Tesch (1990), separating the data from the individual cases (Ayres et al., 2003).

Using Tesch's (1990) "decontextualization and recontextualization" (p. 115) process of interpretive analysis, I borrowed Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to deductive thematic analysis to theme all the interviews. Data was recontextualized by creating categories and then themes identified using NVivo as they pertained to the identified case propositions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) described "A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (p. 362). Themes within this research sought to highlight how youth with learning and experiencing mental health concerns in Manitoba faired during the COVID-19 health pandemic at two different time periods while schools were significantly impacted by public health protocols.

The analysis steps included (1) familiarization, transcribing interviews, and actively re-reading transcripts; (2) generating initial data codes by labelling the data according to the case propositions; (3) collating codes within each of the five case propositions into sub themes; (4) reviewing themes and revising themes by amalgamating, or discarding them; (5) defining and naming the final themes and; (6) producing the report.

Initially driven by the research questions, themes were deducted from the noted theoretical framework and literature as a way of identifying key adaptive systems/processes and how they fostered positive mental health and resilience during the COVID-19 health pandemic while schools were conducting emergency remote instruction (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Within case analysis occurred between each youth and parent pairing, which involved the creation of four in-depth case stories using four interviews from the two different time periods. Drawing on a ghost-writing approach Carl Rhodes (2000) describes this process as "a practice where a researcher engages with a research participant and, as a result, creates a new text that

both tells a story of that participant and implies the involvement of the researcher" (p. 514). Contextually positioned, I used each youth and parent's initial and follow up interviews to create a youth specific case story to capture the youth's experiences succinctly but reflectively from a multi-perspective approach. Participant accounts of events and experiences were not always conveyed sequentially during the interviews, thus a process of analyzing and reorganizing the data into a temporal, chronological re-story was employed (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Participant quotations were used throughout the re-storied case stories, as a way of amplifying the unique experiences of each youth across the two points of inquiry. The four case stories are presented in Chapter Four.

Following the within case analysis, the across case analysis took place within all four pairs to explore commonalities and differences across all participant cases (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions and lived experiences. The final themes are presented and reviewed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative case study explored youth experiences and their parents' perceptions about youth mental health and learning during imposed emergency remote instruction throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a multi-informant and semi longitudinal research design, the purpose of the study was to describe the resilience processes related to navigating remote learning at two different points in time (May 2020 and May 2021). A multimethod analysis was carried out for the sake of eliciting and conveying meaning from the personal accounts of research participants. The findings of this analysis, including rich descriptions about the in-depth experiences of youth and their families navigating the uncharted territory during the pandemic, are described in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Participant Stories

The youth case stories are interpretive narratives created from the initial and follow up youth and parent interviews. Pseudonymous were assigned by the researcher. The stories were drafted by conceptualizing and summarizing the youth interviews primarily, while utilizing parent interviews to support and supplement the in-depth experiences of the youth. Direct quotations are used to capture the insight and meaning of the youth's experiences.

Y01 Case Story (Sam 16-year-old)

Sam, a white 16-year-old in the eleventh grade, and his mother Sharon, a teacher, first participated in interviews in May 2020 when schools were immersed in provincially mandated emergency remote learning. Both were eager to share their observations and experiences navigating this new way of learning from the unique perspective as student, parent, and teacher. Having struggled with ADHD and learning in the past, Sam was adjusting to virtual learning by implementing a fairly structured and organized approach with his home learning. Sam shared that he wasn't "necessarily an organized person" but with the support of his mom he was able to break his day into learning blocks similar to what he would have had in in person learning.

Sam was able to stay on track during the first few weeks of the pandemic, but as the virtual learning continued on, he became increasingly overwhelmed with the workload and he began to notice his distraction grew. At which point he shared "it went downhill quick" and Sam quickly fell behind in his schoolwork and overwhelm followed. At home learning did offer Sam the ability to incorporate flexibility into his day and because he was not always in classes, he had a lot of more time to do schoolwork. Once Sam was able to commit to a task, he could continue with it until it was finished while learning at home.

Sam emphasized the important role his mom played in his learning describing:

> I'm almost actually caught up now because she's kind of given me a goal for each day, including the weekends now of stuff that I have to get done and so she kind of in sense has become the new teacher, so mhm. So that has definitely helped.

While Sharon's skills, support, and "voice of authority" were appreciated by Sam and helped him stay on track and "get stuff done," he also shared that her extreme organization and use of sticky notes with deadlines and tasks was at times becoming overwhelming for him. For Sam, there was no better feeling then completing one of those tasks and he shared that "when she puts up seven sticky notes, but taking one off kind of gives you that feeling of accomplishment which definitely feels really good." Organization and parental support were important in Sam's success while virtual learning.

Sam made a connection between the overwhelming workload, the difficulty of learning at home, and his mental health. In tune with his own stress levels, he candidly opened up about what he felt was a lack of awareness from the teacher's perspectives sharing:

> I can understand where they are coming from, but I think they aren't necessarily thinking of like the mental health aspect of people getting stressed out and stuff like that. Because I think that is one of the reasons why I have found a little bit more stress in people and stuff like that.

Sam maturely reflected on the current learning conditions and how he felt it "exaggerated everything" in terms of stress, mental health, and learning difficulties. He described that "it kind of like, I kinda like get this like uh feeling of being overwhelmed, and I'm never going to finish this and stuff like that." The relationship between learning and mental health was clear for Sam during virtual learning.

Sam transparently explained that his screen time had significantly increased which was at times distracting for him, now being reliant on it for learning and connecting with peers, he emphasized the positive benefits of online accessibility. He depended on the internet to clarify questions related to school content and also to facetime with his friends. While Sam had found some strategies and techniques to adapt to emergency remote learning, he was clear in sharing that he wished that he could go back to school. He joked about not just missing the "cookies from the canteen" but also the support of his teachers. Noticing the impact of not having the direct in person support of teachers Sam expressed that:

> it's almost like a subconscious thing that I have to kinda stay on track in school, whereas, without them here at home it definitely feels like I can goof off and kind of do whatever and then I can't get back to work.

One of his greatest "ah ha" moments of the pandemic was his newfound appreciation for teachers. He described:

> I think it definitely, like put it in perspective of like how much you actually need teachers and like, like [pause] like it just showed you like how much harder it is to be um self-controlling and like having to plan and schedule your day out.

Sam appreciated the critical role his own mom, also a teacher at his school, had in supporting him through this transition. As a high school student whose mom was a teacher at his school, he described a sense of "embarrassment" with receiving support from his mom or having her connect with his teachers pre-emergency remote learning. This was a notable shift for Sam as he described that, "I have started to definitely listen to her and kind of taken everything she says and do it" explaining that he was receptive and grateful for her support.

For Sharon, her role as a teacher and also a mother were greatly influencing and informing one another during this time. Knowing that her own children's sense of overwhelm and stress with keeping up with schoolwork was also being experienced in her students, she passionately spoke to the importance of prioritizing positive connection and well-being. This meant making a point to send emails, check ins, and showing a genuine curiosity around how her students were doing apart from learning. Saddened by what she felt was a "trauma impact from the pandemic and uncertainty" she described noticing "grief and loss" in her students. Sharon had heard her students verbally express their frustration and anger towards their inability to see friends, attend school, and participate in extra curriculars regularly.

Noticing a sense of feeling behind in his learning, Sam was concerned about "missing things that might affect [him] in grade 12." This worry meant that he needed to work "twice as hard next year to learn everything" because of the content he felt was being missed during emergency remote learning. Sam insightfully described his own awareness of when he became stressed which felt like a great sense of overwhelm, negative thinking, and decreased motivation. During this time, Sam used his well-developed coping strategies as he explained:

> I've always found that when I'm stressed a little bit I like listening to music, because music in general has always been something I like listening to and stuff like that and I find that just taking a break from that situation for a minute that does kind of help. I have been going for jogs, I've been trying to go every day.

A momentary breath and break from a stressful situation allowed him to look at a big situation "in more smaller pieces to make it seem less overwhelming." This was also helpful in lowering his stress.

Sam's athletic, competitive nature played a role in motivating him through this challenging period. He shared that "a lot of my friends are a little bit behind" and while that gave him a sense of validation and "acceptance" it also gave him a "boost" to focus in on his work. He confidently shared:

> call it selfish but I kinda tend to find that, if I am ahead of someone, even though I'm feeling behind it kind of gives me a little boost in saying that well I know they can get it done so I could probably get it even quicker because I have to work.

He shared that he had been working hard the past two weeks to catch up and was "feeling good about it again."

A year later in May of 2021, with his eyes set on graduation and university Sam reflected on the difficulties of emergency remote learning and adapting to this year's 50-50 blended model approach. Thinking about the two delivery models Sam described that his workload became "easier" once he switched to 50-50 and he was able to complete schoolwork in the school setting. He was quick to express the concern he had around the quality of his learning throughout the entirety of the pandemic. Confident in elaborating on his greatest source of stress Sam shared:

> school is probably the main one 'cause again, it was like last year is a big shift to go from at home or start at school, which is all I knew to completely at home. Which was a big switch and at school I'm not used to big like changes like that, which I think was a big uhh a big change.

Thinking back on all the changes that occurred in his world over the course of the year, Sam explained how the rapidness, uncertainty and lack of preparation effected his mental health and increased his stress. This heighted sense of overwhelm over the last year:

> felt like a lot of umm…just kind of in my head thinking 'I'm never gonna finish this or how on earth am I gonna get this done in time?' or like a lot of like 'I won't be able to do this or I'm not gonna be able to do this' kind of feeling in me.

Sharon who offered a unique perspective as not only Sam's parent but a teacher at his school described this time as "such [a] prolonged period of stress and uncertainty and change and trauma and just family flux that is happening all the time." Similarly, Sam offered his own perspective on the prolonged stress, building upon what he had shared in his first interview where he described a sense of feeling behind in his learning, Sam expressed, "I feel like I probably am missing out 'cause there are some things that I, at least it feels like that to me that I feel like I should know more about a certain subject." Sam was very appreciative to be back in person learning half the time as it helped with retention and understanding of concepts. But he really felt that the quality of learning that was being done on home learning days was not to par and described with worry and apprehension that "I don't want to say a lack of learning, but a lack of quality of learning possibly. I feel like my marks have gone down just a bit from that." Sharon mirrored much the same, describing a period of great grief for Sam and her youngest who wanted nothing more than to be in school every day.

Staying organized and following routine was key to managing Sam's levels of stress and overwhelm. Being able to draw on his mom's accessibility to the other teachers in his schools, he highlighted the benefit of the school-parent collaboration that occurred in order to support him in organizing and setting deadlines for himself. Although, he was clear to point out that virtual learning was not ideal, Sam maturely applauded his teachers' creative approaches and accessibility through these online platforms. With great respect and appreciation Sam explained, "honestly, it surprises me the amount that a lot of teachers respond back. So yes, I think so. Like

I think the support given by being able to respond is nice." Mirroring Sam's important take aways and noting the long-haul impact of the pandemic on her own children, her students, teachers, and parents Sharon passionately promoted connection and relationship in supporting the well-being and learning of youth.

For Sam, many of the ways that he remained connected to his peers through sport and socialization were interrupted by government health mandates and closures. He felt fortunate enough to be able to stay quite connected with his core group of friends through social media and social distance hangouts. Without his regular extracurriculars like hockey and curling, Sam's boredom grew, and he explained that "there's a lot more alone time which led to me being a lot more bored, but even with that I think because I've got like my PS4 and stuff like that. I was again able to play like with my friends on it so to some extent I was able to solve it, but yeah, it definitely felt a lot a lot more boring to kind of … not being able to do sports."

Family dynamics remained consistent between the first and second interview points, although, a greater sense of personal boundaries became necessary as Sam's family became comfortable sharing their space together more often. Sam learned throughout this period how much he valued his "alone time," which he was able to "communicate effectively" with his family through open and honest discussions. Friday nights became an opportunity for them to support a local restaurant and reconnect as a family and Sam was hopeful this would continue beyond social distancing measures.

The year was marked by tremendous personal growth for Sam, as he shared with pride that he felt a greater sense of independence and problem-solving abilities. Sam's greatest motivator through the last year had been his pursuit of graduation, university, and independence.

Using his application to university to drive his motivation specifically in his math and chemistry class, Sam explained extreme personal growth when he stated:

> I feel like coming from barely wanting to do anything and needing my mum to step in and kind of guide me through it to me actually doing without any like needing any help I feel like that is definitely a change.

Sam expressed disappointment and frustration about the many grade 12 milestones that were going to be impacted because of social distancing, like his graduation and safe grad. This year taught him the importance of goal setting in motivating him and coping with ongoing stress. These strengthened interpersonal skills, paired with his determination and thirst for independence beyond high school, insighted an excitement in Sam as he spoke about the future. He was hopeful that he would be able to regain a sense of his normalcy in experiencing the milestones of moving out on his own and attending an out-of-town university. Sam used this goal and hope to keep him focused and motivated on his studies even through the challenges and he confidently shared, "I just felt like kind of… [it was time to] spread my wings and go my own way."

Y03 Case Story (Tegan 13-year-old)

Tegan, an Indigenous 13-year-old in the eighth grade, and her mother Cindy, a single parent, first participated in interviews in May 2020, when schools were immersed in provincially mandated emergency remote learning. New to experiencing the pandemic and virtual learning, Tegan and her two younger siblings were learning to adapt to the unprecedented conditions of COVID-19 within a single parent household with a single laptop.

What was supposed to be a school year ending filled with excitement and planning for high school, was overrode by full time emergency remote learning and it wasn't long before the

novelty wore off. Tegan shared that “being surrounded by this new environment where we are learning online and having to use all these programs, was kind of cool at first but I’ve kinda gotten used to it.” Feeling a lack of preparation on navigating the online programs, Tegan quickly learned to adapt to this new learning environment with the support of her mom who implemented a structured daily routine. Having been laid off because of the pandemic, Cindy noted the stressful nature of juggling her three children’s unique remote learning expectations and daily schedules. Tegan was grateful for her mom’s help recognizing that “my mom, came up with a schedule for us, which it has been helping like a lot.” Her mom emphasized the importance of such in order to promote “some sort of routine and sense of normalcy.” Although she was following her mother’s well implemented well-structured daily routine, Tegan felt that “school is designed for keeping everyone focused and learning from home, it’s like where you live and it’s a different environment so yea, you’re not used to being in.”

Her resourcefulness led her to utilize the supports as she described, “I ask my mom for help, unless I’m really stuck then I’ll just email my teachers on Teams.” Tegan, who confidently shared that pre pandemic “I haven’t really had worries in school, I am kind of a good student,” was beginning to experience challenges associated with remote instruction. These included “not having the teachers to explain the stuff or like not asking my friends and stuff for help or getting to see them” and missing the ability to learn from hands on projects including activities such as science projects. But Tegan’s independence and persistence continued as she described, “with schoolwork I am kind of just like staying determined. I have just been trying to finish up my work and keep on schedule.”

With high school in the near future, Tegan, as a confident student academically who took great pride and enjoyment in her schoolwork, was becoming increasingly distressed about the future. This meant overthinking and wondering. She shared:

> I am also worried like I need to 'cause they are preparing us for high school and now that I don't have the teachers there and everything, I am afraid that I might not like be ahead enough to be ready for high school.

Fearful that she may be struggling with comprehension and learning independently she shared:

> sometimes I have little problems with the work, but now it's like I am kind of worried 'cause they don't have the teachers to explain the work to me and walk me through the classes that like I might mess up and then like my grade will be affected.

Although Tegan had a teacher who was incorporating daily virtual check ins into the school day where students could ask questions regarding schoolwork like math, Cindy felt that "compared to the other kids, I think she [Tegan] is doing the worst. Just because the level of work is a little bit harder so I can't always help her." This lack of adequate support, difficulty, and quality of course content, and a lack of enjoyment and isolation from peers was leading to Cindy feeling like Tegan was falling behind. As a single parent navigating the learning of her three school aged children, Cindy spoke about the unrealistic nature of deadlines sharing:

> we have to just throw out, like they try to give us guidelines like have this done by this. But those are kind of impossible to follow if you have more than one kid. And I don't know how parents are doing it, who have more than one kid, who have to go to work every day.

Tegan spoke with worry and fear when she explained one of the most significant shifts for her during this time stating, "well, because I notice with this whole COVID thing I have

become a lot more paranoid." Her mom, who was categorized as "high risk," also described how this concerning hyper fixation with contracting the virus was affecting Tegan daily. Cindy explained, "It's the focus everywhere. It's just on that so, I don't know how to explain it, all this is really stressful for her. I think because she's older and really understands."

Tegan described this worry of contracting the COVID-19 virus as:

> kind of like I have been like wanting to like to disinfect everything or stuff that doesn't need to be disinfected and sometimes like you just want to stay away…Like we haven't been going out but sometimes on walks and everything I'll like keep my hands to myself and kind of like try to keep my distance and like yeah.

Becoming so fixated on safety precautions Tegan shared that "washing my hands has become like a big problem." Cindy described how Tegan's increased time online self-researching the virus became problematic, "and then she doesn't tell me, so she's just basically feeding into her own paranoia and then she doesn't tell me that she looked up these things and now she knows the conspiracies for four days after."

As a family being cooped up together twenty-four-seven, tensions were beginning to rise and Cindy explained, "I think it's just us all being on top of each other like nobody has their own space, nobody can just go and be by themselves and get some alone time." With irritability at an all-time high, Cindy described, "well I'm pretty much crabby all the time so is the thirteen-year-old, and probably the youngest also." Cindy reached a point of needing to remove Tegan's phone from her because she'd spend all night awake on it and wake up "just miserable" and take it out on her siblings resulting in constant "little arguments" and a lack of willingness to help one another with chores and responsibilities.

With hopes of maintaining some sense of normalcy, Tegan prioritized staying connected with her friends daily sharing, “one thing I do try like is keeping in touch…I like chat with my friends like texting every day, but I like to call them like once a week or even more.” And while Tegan was enjoying the creative approaches to engagement that her school and teachers were putting forth, like parades and surprise treats in their learning packages, Cindy felt that more one-to-one contact with the students would have been beneficial to their well-being and learning.

A year later in May of 2021, Tegan and Cindy offered insight into the changes and transitions that their family experienced in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the initial interview, Tegan experienced the grief of a major milestone that she looked forward to for so long, her grade eight graduation ceremony. Her mom shared that “she was just really disappointed, so we had to find other ways for her to celebrate that.” Tegan was vulnerable in sharing that:

> last year definitely affected my mental health a lot. Just ‘cause it was the outbreak and like the quarantine. and I think I was it was very stressful and gave me a lot of anxiety, but uhm, living through it and like and then taking the safety measures and just getting really just getting used to it up has gave me more peace of mind now.

Tegan reflected back on her return to school in September 2021and her fear and adjustment to health protocols. She described, “for the first month again was like kind of scary. Because you're like in the new school you know everyone wearing masks and social distancing and then also like being scared of getting the virus too.” Tegan elaborated on the decrease in worry related to the pandemic and “peace of mind” that she experienced because of the reassuring nature of school cleaning and sanitizing procedures expressing, “I think now I've

calmed down a lot like I trust like the systems that we have in place and it's getting easier for me."

Adapting to a new form of 50-50 learning where she attended school in person every other day and virtually on alternate days, Tegan was experiencing an elevated sense of appreciation stating:

> this is much better than before. Because of the in-person element… kind of keeping me sane 'cause I can like get out of the house and learn and you know, see some of my friends some more being in a new environment.

Tegan reported that the online element of the school still posed some challenges for her like distraction and difficulty focusing. Her online presence increased with the continuance of virtual learning, remote socializing with friends, and receiving tutoring support for one of her classes. Alternatively, there were many instances where the virtual learning was more accommodating as she explained, "ELA is pretty good 'cause we're doing book clubs and stuff and writing. And I think French surprisingly is easier at home 'cause we watch videos, and I cannot be as shy at home practicing." While Tegan felt that 50-50 learning was a better option then full virtual learning, she was clear in sharing the point that:

> I think being at school is definitely a lot better than being at home and then just like if we're doing something hard, like examples going through the work and then having someone explain it to you really well helps a lot with me learning.

Noticing the positive improvements to her mood, attitude, and overall well-being Tegan and Cindy reflected on their family's perseverance and determination during a very difficult year. Cindy described that "it was really just sheer willpower, like just keep on the kids and just do it, just push through and get it done." Noticing an increased sense of happiness and improved

motivation, Tegan was able to begin go outside, into the public, and to see some friends safely with a sense of confidence and assurance in the safety measures which gave her "more peace of mind." With Cindy returning to work and Tegan learning to take the city bus to school, she experienced significant personal growth sharing, "[it was] scary at first, but now it's like made me feel like more of an adult like independent especially keeping safe on the city bus like with COVID and just in general."

Tegan and Cindy both remained hopeful for greater "normalcy" as vaccination roll outs began. Experiencing a sense of exhaustion and social disconnection the family longed for the loosening of restrictions in order to reconnect with others safely. Never having experienced high school at full capacity, Tegan shared:

> I'm looking forward to like something new like in grade 10 new classes. You know, being able to try new things, seeing how that goes. And yeah, and just seeing like what's it gonna be like next year. You know, are things going to be the same or are things going to be better.

As a family guided by strong cultural connections and practices, Tegan highlighted the importance keeping a "optimistic mind" when facing difficult times.

Y04 Case Story (Bella 14-year-old)

Bella, a white 14-year-old in the eighth grade, and her mother, Marie, first participated in interviews in May 2020 when schools were immersed in provincially mandated emergency remote learning. Bella was articulate and insightful as she expressively shared her experiences. She was keen to share her experiences and perspectives about what it was like for her doing online learning in May 2020.

Before the pandemic, Bella described herself as a cat and volleyball enthusiast. She said she could be found spending her time with friends and family and working on schoolwork. Managing ADHD, as well as mental health concerns related to anxiety and depression, Bella was already well connected to a community mental health service. This service often collaborated with her school to implement supportive accommodations and strategies to promote her success. As Bella has learned about herself, she has developed tremendous insights into her needs and strengths particularly within the classroom which she eloquently spoke to in the interview.

In person typical classroom learning posed many challenges for Bella, as the loud noises and distractions from the other students affected her ability to focus and often exacerbated her feelings of overwhelm and worried thinking. She explained that:

> in loud rooms with lots of people and if I have had a bad day, like my mood… it's really hard because then I can't focus and I start fidgeting and it doesn't help because it's a loud room and the teachers wondering why I'm not working.

Loud rooms with lots of people changed her mood sometimes, leading her to become frustrated and short with her friends and family. As someone whose mother described her as "academically quite strong," her emotional struggles were often missed by educators and, as Bella would describe it, she "flew under the radar" and so open communication between her supports and teachers was critical. Bella explained that "teachers don't notice that I'm struggling at all unless I straight out tell them."

Bella's mom bolstered that:

> she has a good relationship with her teacher. Her teacher has been very helpful with her learning and trying to like navigate through like what ADHD looks like in an adolescent girl is much different than an adolescent boy. You know, and trying to understand what is

> that for her, and how does she manage those days when she's feeling very anxious and stuff so her teacher has been a really good help for her, she's been very understanding.

Throughout the interviews, Bella and Marie were appreciative of the teacher's approaches both pre and during emergency remote learning. Throughout the interviews they frequently commented about how hard teachers have been working to make things work.

Initially, while fairly new to emergency remote learning Bella expressed:

> I do feel a lot better working, because I'm not surrounded by a bunch of people who are constantly talking, so that feels a lot better. And being able to take it at my own pace has really helped as well.

As someone who struggled to focus within a traditional classroom setting, Bella was able to "you know, put in headphones, listen to music, sit on the couch under a cozy blanket with the laptop and work and it's actually a better environment for her than in a classroom where there's lots of kids" as her mother described. Bella shared she has always preferred working independently, while group projects were always "a source of stress for her" and so being able to create "a quiet, safe workplace where I can…be comfortable helps."

Emergency remote learning, in many ways, was well suited to Bella's learning preferences, her mental health concerns, fears, and stresses. Overthinking created challenges for her when needing to ask for help from her teacher sharing that "well for me it's a lot to do with over analyzing and then being scared so scared to ask people for help scared to go do things." This was further made difficult for Bella, as she described:

> Well I feel like I'm not learning as much as I should be because it's pretty difficult to ask questions and understand the projects when it's all been given online, so it's almost like I

> feel like I'm harassing my teacher asking so many questions because there's so little detail about the assignments.

This became a source of worry for her regarding her preparation for her grade nine year, feeling that she wasn't going to be "super ready" for the upcoming curricular expectations when she entered high school.

Bella, who lives between her mom and dad's home, has felt able to openly communicate her struggles throughout the time of emergency remote learning and social distancing measures. The parents maintained an "open door possibility" and flexibility in their children's schedules when needed to best support them through this period of new learning. Her mother said:

> She was very open about talking about where her anxiety comes from is her trying to… she used a term today, she said, 'trying to take care of myself.' And so there comes anxiety about trying to take care of yourself and finding a time and a way because all of the things that we would normally do to take care of ourselves, go to the gym, go to a movie, go out to eat, like so many of those things have been taken away.

While Bella and mother shared that she was more focused and less distracted doing her schoolwork at home, which led to "less anxiety," both openly talked about the increase in a "different type of anxiety" due to social isolation and loneliness, alongside an increase in sadness and loneliness. Bella shared that "it's a lot of quiet time [light laughter], so I haven't been doing as much, I feel extra lazy…. It's a lot of time to just sit and think, which just isn't the best sometimes." For Bella, the absence of the "social aspect of school, so being with people" as she described was greatly felt. Bella clearly prioritizes relationships, connection, communication, and helping others, and so the social distancing measures began to take a toll on her. She highlighted that "I also miss volleyball a lot because my season got cancelled, so that was a huge

impact since it was my first year going to Nationals." She missed activities and being with her friends.

During these turbulent times, Bella was able to draw on the strengths and supportive relationships, including her parents, teachers, and friends. During the interview she shared that she had recently began "easing into" reconnecting with a few friends in person following social distancing guidelines. She said that "it was almost like you had so many things to talk about and it felt really good to be talking to someone besides your family." For Bella, relationships are a great source of support, motivation, and strength. Her teacher continued to contribute to this as she navigated these unprecedented times sharing that:

> this year I've actually had pretty great teachers, there's just been a couple incidents where I haven't been able to learn very well, but for the most part my teachers have been super supportive and helpful reaching out to me during this. And mom, dad, trying to make sure I'm getting my work done, really focusing on seeing if I'm ok. It's been a lot of actually doing things together, which has helped a lot.

She was reflective of the relationships that helped her to manage this difficult time.

Fast forward to June 2021, and Bella was wrapping up her first year of high school and reflecting on the last year's countless shifts and changes. After hearing a summary of her previous interview, she shared:

> Honestly, I thought it was hilarious when I said that it was easier for online learning because I took a complete 180 and it's very difficult now. But I think at the time it was kind of… it was almost like a honeymoon phase or like it's like everything was good and I was like always, basically a vacation. And you know it was easier because I was in the comfort of my own home, and I could work at my own pace.

Over a one-year period, a lot had changed for Bella.

One year later, Bella was impacted by stringent social distancing measures, overwhelm, and increased stress which ultimately landed her in a crisis stabilization unit. She described, “my depression's been super like on like also roller coaster during this so when it gets really bad and completely stops. Uhm, I have a really hard time being motivated during those times.” Bella had a mature insight into the relationship between her own stress experiences and the impact to her relationships sharing that “it was just overwhelming for me ‘cause I would constantly like I would become irritable as well around people and I hated that ‘cause I would just like snap because I was so stressed.” As someone who values relationships, and often is described as having a “strong moral compass,” experiencing this turmoil in her relationships was frustrating for her.

Beginning the year with in-person learning every other day, where students were split into groups of two based on their last names, Bella felt the year was “really tough yeah, ‘cause I mean, I'm really nervous with making new friends so …I didn't know anyone.” Leading to the ultimate return to online learning, Bella spoke with the interviewer about the widespread sense of defeat, as she described, “by the time they announced that we're doing online learning again we almost just like threw in the towel. I feel like a lot of people, including the teachers. So this round has been REALLY HARD [emphasis].” While online learning had once provided some reprieve, one year later it was not welcomed.

As the year went on and she navigated these unique circumstances, she struggled to focus and stay on track and she shared that “in fact, I had to up my ADHD meds because my ADHD was getting really bad which did not help.” Virtual learning made it hard for Bella in:

> trying to retain everything and comprehend what's going on. ‘Cause I can learn something and in that day be like I totally understand this and I know what to do. But the next day I don't know what I learned and it's really difficult.

Being able to play volleyball, connect with friends, or watch movies was no longer available, which made it hard for Bella to use the strategies she had once found most helpful.

Through parental advocacy and parent teacher collaboration, Bella was able to access the hybrid model of synchronized learning, which was better suited to fostering her strengths and resources. Meaning those with necessary learning accommodations were able to attend in person while the remainder of the students simultaneously learned virtually. The routine, structured pacing, due dates, and face to face instruction lent to a better learning experience for Bella and she shared:

> doing learning in person and being able to grow everyday really grew that motivation because it's kind of like pushing me to do it because I have to instead of doing online where I'm kind of just sitting there like listening, it's just like blah blah blah blah blah. So being able to go in and get ready for my day and going to school motivates me and makes me almost like energized, I would say.

This approach also allowed Bella to benefit from the learning strategies that she found most helpful as she described:

> definitely with people in person and I'm a big visual learner. So I guess being in person helps a lot too with that but big explanations because I constantly have questions, so being able to be face to face with someone who is showing me and explaining it super well. which is hard like I probably couldn't even do that [light laughter].

One of the ways Bella and her family navigated these extremely challenging circumstances was by relying on one and other. Finding a new appreciation for the things they once enjoyed connecting on that they had lost track of in the busyness of life, the family spent time going for walks, exploring local attractions, and learning to appreciate the slower paced lifestyle. When describing her relationship with her mom, Bella shared, “we already had great like connection and relationship but just being able to…not be constantly rushed to do things is really helpful.”

Bella also drew on her friendships and new relationship with her boyfriend in order to support her through these difficult times sharing:

> I went outside so I was able to like meet up with some friends. Uhm, I actually I got a…my boyfriend in October. Ah, well, that's all been super difficult with COVID. But being able to talk to him helped a lot.

The pandemic also rendered the growth of many of Bella’s interpersonal qualities as she described:

> I would like to say that my patience grew like…I have a lot more patience now because I'm just having to get used to all of these changes I mean, it's not the best because I still get super stressed out over these kinds of things. I'm constantly wondering like what's going to happen next with the restrictions but it's showing me that like I have to go with the flow and I don't really have a choice I wasn't really good with before.

Bella and her mother spoke to an increased sense of independence that she developed throughout this year, taking on a greater responsibility for her learning and well-being, and challenging herself to take on a part time job in the public service sector amidst the challenges of social distancing measures. Taking on a part time job during the pandemic did add some stress and

pressure to Bella's life, as she described, "it was very difficult and having to constantly chase the rules for the store due to COVID was really difficult because you get like complaints and employee, we have multiple employees quit on us." Working during the pandemic was complicated by having to enforce provincially mandated safety measures but it made Bella happy to be able to make her own money to spend.

As the school year was coming to a close, Bella reflected on the impact of pandemic fatigue through the rushed nature of the curriculum delivery "so it's kind of like us learning how to do things as fast as we can. But not doing it well…I think it was like a factory where they produced SO MUCH [emphasis], but the quality is terrible! [light laughter]." She saw this in her own teachers defeated nature and approach describing that "like I had one of my favorite teachers, my science teacher, I love science, she was like 'I'm done like I think I just threw in the towel' [light laughter] …And I'm like 'well I feel you'." Both Bella and her mother emphasized the importance of teachers continuing to engage and connect with students around "how they're doing" in order to build relationships and develop a greater understanding of their unique needs.

Bella explained the importance of hope and religious faith to her in her day-to-day motivation and well-being. She was hopeful that innovation and the lessons learned throughout this time around slowing down, family connection, and perspective would lend to a more positive future, where a sense of normalcy could be restored. She shared that "I think I get this a lot from like my mom and my dad but the idea that like if you don't have hope you're not helping the cause like it have a positive outlook on something you're not contributing."

Y05 Case Story (Maddy 12-year-old)

Maddy, a white 12-year-old in the sixth grade, and her father, Joe, first participated in interviews in May 2020 when schools were immersed in provincially mandated emergency remote learning. Joe described that Maddy:

> had struggles all of her life particularly with anxiety and mood lability. She ha[d] an EA at school that ha[d] been working with her a little bit more than she would other students kind of been assigned to work with her especially for math.

Joe, who works in the mental health field, and his wife have advocated on behalf of their children's learning and mental health needs. Because of this, Maddy has a manageable individualized learning plan with small markers, check ins, and due dates to allow for more structure and organization. Joe feels this has been successful, as he feels his daughter's lack of self-confidence and negative self-beliefs prevent her from voicing her need for extra support. Maddy's greatest strengths and enjoyment are experienced in her ELA class where she gets to do her favorite things like reading and writing.

While her parents, both employed as full time "essential workers," were working out of the home, Maddy was learning to navigate the nuances of online learning and was taking on new responsibilities of caring for two of her three younger siblings and her two dogs. This meant preparing meals and also helping them with virtual learning. The initial phase of the pandemic was filled with uncertainty and sadness for Maddy as she described:

> Well, it's hard because we can't really see much people anymore so, yeah and we are like, we don't even know when we will go back, that's the sad part…and we are, uhm we are like going to a new school soon and that's like not built yet because they had to postpone it because of the pandemic.

With her and her two younger siblings attempting to participate in daily virtual learning that all looked very different from one another, Maddy was experiencing the strain and pressure of organizing and supporting not only her own learning but also her siblings. Maddy shared her and her siblings were "like social butterflies…so it's pretty hard for [them] not to be in school doing stuff like in real life." making it extremely difficult to focus and learn all while navigating the technical and practical issues of operating three online classrooms at once.

The stress and increased responsibility of juggling duties was felt by Maddy and also her parents, who were attempting to meet the expectations of their full-time employment and additionally taking on new roles as primary educational supports for the children. As Joe described:

> I get to work, and shortly after I get to work I check in with the kids, make sure they are trying to get themselves going, and that they are working towards something that day. I often the night before check what assignments are due and things that they need to do so I kind of tell them today we need to work on this, today we need to focus on this a little bit because when I get home at night then its eat supper, and its, then its looking at homework often times with the kids or trying to ascertain whether they have their work done for that day try and submit it somehow online, try and figure that part out.

Highly involved in the children's learning, before and during this stage of the pandemic, Joe was very aware of how emergency remote learning was affecting his daughter's motivation, citing that she was "definitely struggling and even when she does the work it seems like it's almost like it's the bare minimum." Joe felt a pressure and responsibility to ensure the daily academic success of his children which were all experiencing emergency remote learning differently. Joe felt deeply that Maddy's low motivation and inability to organize and structure

herself was leading to increased stress, worry, low moods, and sadness from being isolated from her peers and friends.

Feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work that was continuing to flood in, with unattainable due dates, and not feeling able to connect with her teacher to support her understanding of the content became an ongoing stressor for Maddy. Reaching out to others when needing help was always hard for her and so the inability to connect face-to-face with her teacher made this even harder. Missing the relationship with her teacher, she explained, “not seeing her is kind of a stress because you’re like, some of the work you don’t understand as well without her.” Finding it challenging without the teacher in person to help with understanding topics, she became reliant on her virtual morning check ins with her teacher and the opportunity to receive support and help with outstanding questions. Virtual learning wasn’t all negative for Maddy as she recognized that the ability to work at her own pace, sans frequent task switching, actually supported her ability to focus without distractions and complete tasks. Completing tasks made her feel better as she described, “I like when I get to hand stuff in because then it’s just another thing lifted on my chest and I don’t have to worry about anymore.” Maddy felt and appreciated her father’s motivating and supportive nature as she navigated the challenges faced with learning in this new unique way.

Being raised in a family that speaks openly about mental health and well-being, Maddy has always had a thorough understanding of her struggles, but also her resources and strengths in navigating her stress. While experiencing unique changing expectations and ways of living, Maddy’s family attempted to maintain family connection and communication through game nights and outdoor physical activities in order to promote their family mental health and cope

with the stressors of the uncertainty that they faced. Fortunate enough to have a friend who lived a few houses away, Maddy was able to engage in some social distancing outside play with her.

Noticing the toll of the pandemic beginning to impact not only the children's mental health but the parents, Joe insightfully highlighted his and his wife's increased stress and recent "on edge" nature and the toll it had on the rest of the family and communication break downs. While the family was hopeful that in person instruction would resume shortly, Joe felt that emphasizing structure, student collaboration in planning and organizing a schedule, and frequent teacher connection and check ins and personal interactions would be most helpful for his daughter as they navigated the emergency remote learning period.

Just over a year later Maddy was completing her grade seven year in a newly built school. She was becoming accustomed to the new norm of COVID-19 safety precautions like mask wearing and social distancing measures. Having additionally experienced remote learning in January 2021, Maddy felt that the many changes of the last year, limited contact with people, lack of support from teachers, feelings of discouragement and failure, difficulty learning online, and the distraction and disorganization of learning from home contributed to her worsening ADHD, which she described as her ability to focus and her motivation. Reflecting on the challenges of the past year Maddy shared:

> It was just really hard to like stay ahead when I'm at home because, well, I had siblings and it was just really easy to get distracted and umm it was just harder to focus like I even had trouble focusing at school. So online was pretty hard. Whenever like I needed help, I wouldn't really get what I needed like I needed more than just like a call after school.

Although remote learning had been recently reinstated in her city in attempts to lower the COVID-19 case count, Maddy's new ADHD diagnosis and her parents' essential worker status

allowed her the opportunity to participate in a new hybrid model of synchronized learning. Meaning that those with necessary learning accommodations were able to attend in person while the remainder of the student simultaneously learned virtually. Expressing her gratitude towards this opportunity to learn in person she described, “that was really nice. And I mean I have been ahead pretty recently, which is really good and I feel confident and I feel like that's a good thing.” While she talked about the positives, Maddy was sure to be transparent about some of the challenges associated with it adding:

> It can be difficult sometimes because my teacher is online with other classmates. But after that then she will help us, which is fun. And other than that I really miss my friends at school and I miss hanging out with people when I can or like in my free time.

Maddy felt fortunate to have had a teacher who was very understanding and acknowledged that students had a lot on their plate during this time and supported them in prioritizing next steps. Having experienced online learning herself as a student, Maddy described feeling very understood and supported by her teacher, who prioritized her student’s well-being and often checked in on their “stress levels”. Teacher’s struggles to adapt to new ways of teaching like emergency remote learning, and synchronized mixed approaches were obvious to Maddy and Joe and it became evident to them that they too were experiencing strain and stressors with adapting. Maddy emphasized an important message for other teachers:

> I would definitely tell them to make sure their students are doing well and like just make sure they're doing like good in their mental state too, and it's not too overwhelming all the work and just make sure they're getting it done like and know their understanding of it.

Experiencing firsthand the “cumulative impact” of the last year of pandemic and social distancing measures such as emergency remote learning and isolation from peers, Joe’s focus

shifted from prioritizing academics early on in the initial stages, to his increasing concern of his children's mental health and well-being. Maddy was insightfully self-aware about her experience of the pandemic, emergency remote learning, the many shifts in learning approach, and the effect on her ability to focus, "get things done," procrastination, and motivation. She explained, "I think I've developed more ADHD over the time because it has been really stressful and it's just not fun to do so it has affected my mental state to." Having always struggled with change, Maddy confidently shared that she felt that the ebbs and flows of the last year had "definitely affected" her more than others and lent to her feeling a sense of discouragement in herself. As school, extra curriculars, social hangouts, and everything Maddy's life shifted to virtual "she would tell you straight up, she hates the online activities" Joe shared.

Recognizing the lack of routine, structure, social connections, and typical activities for Maddy and their other children, Joe and Maddy developed a new appreciation for in person learning, mental health awareness and promotion, and connection and understanding. As an active participant in advocating for Maddy's mental health, well-being, and academic success, Joe emphasized the critical nature of mental health check ins, interactive engagement, and connection and structure for youth during these unprecedented times. He shared, "the worst mental health I saw with the kids was when they had to do stuff when they were more virtual, you know, that is the worst I've seen my kids in terms of their mental health."

Maddy's hopelessness, impacted motivation, and increased sadness was a shared experience within her family. With the novelty of the pandemic, and increased motivation of parents to continue to engage their children beginning to wear off, Joe elaborated on the increasing tensions and stressors within his family unit. He described:

> It's almost like depressing, you almost feel more depressed as a family because things shut down again, right, and you can't do anything and yea. It's been more stressful for parents too, like myself and my wife, we feel more stressed as time goes on you feel, it's almost like a hopeless feeling, right, that you kind of get and you end up with less activities with the kids, less caring sometimes almost you feel less caring.

For Maddy, the hardest part was the impacted Christmas and traditional celebrations. She shared with sadness:

> you wouldn't be able to see family or friends and do things how you would like in normal, like without a pandemic. Which was really hard 'cause it was really hard not to do like some of the same things that you would do and miss out on it. It would just not be as fun and I don't know just… sadder.

Additionally, experiencing the "compound" effect of working in mental health during the pandemic, while attempting to support additional stressors and responsibilities within his home, Joe highlighted the present essence of fatigue and burnout impacting him. As a person who once "reenergized and recharged" through social connections with peers and friends, Joe himself was feeling the weight of the social restrictions. He shared how this, combined with his children and wife's ongoing impact and struggles, was leading to what he believed was the "worst relationship with [their] kids that [that] had our whole entire life."

In attempt to mitigate the negative toll experienced throughout the family, academic expectations were lowered, although Joe commented on worrying about the children's ability to "catch back up" eventually. Recognizing the "deterioration in mental health" in the family, it was decided that they would carefully loosen their adherence to social distancing measures by

expanding their social bubble to allow for a friend to safely interact with the children. In doing so Joe noticed that the children:

> started like looking forward to things again…they were off their tablets more, smiling a lot more, their general well-being went up, it increased for sure. I don't know how you want to classify well-being, but they were happier, they were arguing less with parents, they were even more engaged a little bit with schooling, like they just generally felt a bit better.

As Maddy and her family navigated the ever-changing pandemic, she developed a greater sense of responsibility within her household. She explained:

> I have been helping a lot with siblings or like we have two dogs and three geckos, so I've been helping a lot with them, all of that, I guess. And just like helping my parents do chores or if they need help with something then I will be there, I guess.

Feeling better equipped to support her siblings when needed, Maddy experienced a sense of confidence in her role as a big sister. Although she did enjoy spending time with her siblings hanging out outside doing fun activities together, Maddy was extremely happy to see some of friends again. Her passion for writing continued to grow during this time, often leaning on her writing to help her navigate difficult and stressful situations. With excitement Maddy shared, "I really enjoy writing even about my life or past experiences I just find it really calming and enjoyable, really."

While Maddy shared many difficult and challenging hurdles faced by her and her family over the last year, she remained motivated and hopeful that her world would return to a more familiar pre-pandemic experience. She looked forward to eventually having the rest of her fellow classmates return to the classroom, allowing her to finally meet them, and enjoying the fun of

summer activities like camping, swimming, and seeing family. Hope, a positive outlook, and optimism for the future were all central for Maddy during this pandemic, quoting that “some things just remind you that you have to stay positive.”

Chapter Five: Across Participant Findings

This chapter provides a summary of the results of the across-participant analysis. As presented in Chapter Four, the initial and follow up youth and parent interviews revealed participants youths' individual experiences. Commonalities across participants and conceptual themes were also evident. Employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to deductive thematic analysis revealed several commonalities but also points of variety and difference. Due to the array of youth experiences and differences in the amount of information provided by each youth and their parents during the research interview, the criterion for inclusion of across-participant theme was not that it was discussed by each participant, but that it was discussed by at least a half of the participants or otherwise specified. Parent interviews were used to supplement theme findings. In specifically identified circumstances parents described their own unique themes.

Across overarching case propositions five themes were identified: (a) COVID19-learning impact (b) COVID-19 mental health impact, (c) youth interpersonal competencies, (d) COVID-19 family dynamics, & (e) adaptive systems and processes. There were also more specific sub case propositions associated with each overarching proposition (see Table 3 below). In this chapter, each case proposition and its overarching themes are discussed, and subthemes are used to further describe overarching themes. Direct quotes are included in the presentation of the findings and are italicized to signify and highlight the participant voices.

Table 3

Case Propositions and Qualitative Themes

Case Propositions	Themes	Follow Up Themes
COVID-19 Learning Impact	Challenges • Focus And Motivation • Overwhelm • Asking for Help Strengths • Self-Pacing Missing School and Teachers • Direct Instruction • Hands On Learning • Familiarity	Rushed Learning • Missing Content • Feeling Behind • Feeling Ill Prepared for Next Year Difficulty of Online Learning New Appreciation for in Person Learning • Appreciation For 50/50 And Synchronized Learning
COVID-19 Mental Health Impact	Stress • Feeling Down Worry • School Related Worry • Health Related Worry	Mental Health Concerns • Increased Stress and Anxiety • School Related Worry • Sadness And Depression Missing Friends • Friendship Appreciation Long Haul Mental Health Impacts Improvement in Stress and Anxiety Importance of Mental Health
Youth Individual Competencies	Personal attributes • Determination • Independence • Perspective Coping Skills • Breathing • Music • Distraction • Physical Activity • Relationships	Personal Attributes • Independence • Determination and Perseverance Coping Strategies • Relationships

Case Propositions	Themes	Follow Up Themes
COVID-19 Family Dynamics	New Roles • Juggling Responsibilities • Parental Overwhelm	Family Closeness Increased Independence
	Increased Irritability	Parental Mental Health Strain
Adaptive Systems & Processes	Parental Educational Support • Routine	Parental Educational Support
	Teachers • Connection & Engagement • Lack of Mental Health Support • Lack of Structure & Consistency • Lack of Feedback & Individual Support	Teachers • Connection & Engagement • Accessible • Teacher Impact
	Family School Collaboration • Increased Communication • Lack of Communication	Family School Collaboration • Lack of Collaboration • Helpful Collaboration Experienced • Increased Collaboration & Communication Hope & Motivation • Increased Motivation • Hope & Optimism for the Future

COVID-19 Learning Impact

With schools provincially all shifting to emergency remote learning, all participants' educational experiences changed at the time of the initial interviews. Learning meant engaging in school activities, acquiring new knowledge, understanding concepts, focusing on school related content, mastering new skills, and completing work. While they all reported *challenges* associated with learning online, some of the participants were able to identify *strengths*

associated with the new delivery method. However, all the participants reflected on *missing* elements related to their school-based experiences.

Challenges

Concerns related to school challenges related to the interruptions of emergency remote instruction, demonstrated disengagement, impacted motivation and time management, and increased academic worries (Cohen et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Lessard & Puhl, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Save the Children, 2021; Scott et al., 2021). Youth within my study also experienced these issues. Participants identified three major themes related to challenges learning online during the initial interviews which included impacted *focus and motivation, overwhelm,* and *difficulty asking for help*.

Focus and Motivation. Unanimously, all the youth identified focus and motivation while online learning to be a great challenge as they attempted to adapt to new environments and distractions. For example, Sam described the impact emergency remote learning had on his motivation sharing:

> At school I usually find that one of the things I learned is that teachers are actually something I really need because they are kind of, it's almost like a subconscious thing that I have to kinda stay on track in school, whereas, without them here at home it definitely feels like I can goof off and kind of do whatever and then I can't get back to work and then yeah I don't know.

Another participant, Bella said, "The only thing is that now I am like constantly distracted by family members, other things in the house, my phone, so I do find it hard to get started on work sometimes." These findings highlight the lack of routine and structure associated with emergency remote learning but also the difficulty of focusing on school when you are at

home with new distractions. An example of this was when Sam said, “It just showed you like how much harder it is to be um self-controlling and like having to plan and schedule your day out.” Adjusting to learning in an environment with novel distractions poses difficulties and youth felt it was extremely hard to focus and minimize distractions while learning at home.

Overwhelm. Both the parents and the youth felt overwhelmed; the youth felt it was too much to adjust to this new way of learning with little guidance and parents felt it in the context of the expectations to become supplementary teachers of their children as they adapted to remote learning. Participants described overwhelm as too much schoolwork, difficulty keeping up and accomplishing tasks, difficulty participating in activities, and the combination of their emotional experiences. Three of the parents observed a general sense of overwhelm in their children regarding their children’s school workload. For many, they were concerned about the on-going continued level of content focused academic work and high expectations being put on their children during this time of uncertainty and transition and the toll that took on their children. The youth were challenged and overwhelmed by the continual academic demands, the adoption of a new learning platform, and the expectations to continue to persevere amidst these changes with limited academic, social, and emotional support from school staff.

Sam’s mom described:

> Those first two weeks while they were trying to get their heads together and figure what this was all about and teachers were again, in my opinion, pushing forward like kids who are in front of them in their classrooms and teaching at an unrealistic pace.

Sam explained:

> So, there was a time where everything I was handing in a week and a half ago was all late because I’d just gotten to a point where I was so overwhelmed, I was like ‘oh no, how am

> I going to get this done…So, I think, yeah, that is definitely something that overwhelms people, yeah.

He also offered his perspective on the overwhelm of his peers stating:

> I would say just that, just kinda thinking that a lot of kids, I think teachers haven't fully like, I guess like, calmed down the course load, and so I feel like some kids are getting behind. Yeah, I guess, I think teachers haven't slowed down, like it'd been recommended by I think the provincial government. And I can understand where they are coming from, but I think they aren't necessarily thinking of like the mental health aspect of people getting stressed out and stuff like that. Because I think that is one of the reasons why I have found a little bit more stress in people and stuff like that.

In describing his daughter, Maddy's dad said:

> She does feel a constant pressure because she said like she feels so stressed out that she can't get all her work and she doesn't know what to do, uhm its almost like a, probably an overwhelmingness than a lack of sense of direction. That's causing a little bit of her problems too and why she's not motivated because if she is overwhelmed and doesn't have that direction like, well…let's just, just leave it whatever, walk away, feels more comfortable. Yeah so, because she did a number of times tell me how stressed she was, how she feels so much stress, how, it's just too much, kind of her words, just too much, can't do kind of thing so…there has been more frustration and stress over school, more tearfulness and overwhelmingness feelings from her as she expresses them anyways.

These are a few examples of what it was like for youth to be overwhelmed and then what the parents said about it. Undeniably overwhelm felt by youth influenced their ability to engage to

the best of their ability in online learning and learn effectively. Additionally, it affected their emotional well-being.

Asking for Help. Three of the four youth spoke about their struggles with asking for help amidst the challenges of emergency remote learning. Sam said:

> There have been times where I have been like a week behind on some stuff and I definitely felt shy or scared to ask the teacher a question about it because I'm that far behind and so I think that honestly make it a little bit harder, just like, yeah.

Bella explained:

> Well, I feel like I'm not learning as much as I should be because it's pretty difficult to ask questions and understand the projects when it's all been given online, so it's almost like I feel like I'm harassing my teacher asking so many questions because there's so little detail about the assignments.

Many youth were worried about asking for help because they felt they should know about what to be doing, that it brought unwanted attention or reflected poorly on them, and that they were burdening their already overworked teachers.

Strengths

All the youth were able to identify strengths, what worked for them, and what they liked about emergency remote learning including three of the four who emphasized the benefits associated with being able to *self-pace* and incorporate flexibility into their schedules. *Not having the distractions* of the classroom, or the expectation of the structured school day, and teacher implemented task switching was posing a benefit to the youth.

Self-Pacing. The ability to determine the structure of their day and incorporate flexibility into the assignments they worked on, for how long and at what pace, proved to be a significant

strength for youth. Several spoke about the benefit of not having to follow a fixed daily schedule and school-based structure and not having to abide by frequent task switching found in typical school days. Sam discussed the benefit of his flexibility but also the consequences sharing:

> It's definitely nice knowing that I have the flexibility to do stuff whenever I want, but like I said earlier not necessarily having a schedule does make it hard to stay on track so, it kind of balances out there so.

Bella felt that "Being able to take it at my own pace has really helped as well." Adding that:

> Taking it at your own pace has really helped my anxiety and making sure that I don't have a lot of pressure instead of some other assignments where it's like you have to get it done by this date with this many points, this is your grade and all that.

While the consensus amongst the youth's parents was that the shift to emergency remote learning was not beneficial to their children's academic success or overall well-being, one parent was able to reflect on some of the growth opportunities despite how hard it was to complete the school tasks. Bella's mom shared with enthusiasm:

> I will say the one thing that has been the silver lining in this is that Bella has shown a lot of independence, which is good, because I am not a teacher, so I spend my focus with the homeschooling is with her younger sister. I think it's like that fact that Bella can work at her own pace works really well with her mental health I think. So she doesn't feel the pressure of keeping up with her peers necessarily, or also being slowed down by her peers.

She further explained:

> So I think just like the environment of home allows her to go into her room and crack down and then like take a break and have a snack and then get back to it. It seems to be working ok for her, like her specifically.

Maddy felt that there were elements that made learning easier explaining that "just like having the time of day, because sometimes well the teacher is like let's switch to the next thing and if you're not done yet you can just slowly finish that." In this context, remote learning provided the opportunity for youth to explore different ways of approaching schoolwork and in a different context presented a unique opportunity for youth to develop independence and self-determination.

Missing School & Teachers

In discussing the impact of learning during these unprecedented times, the youth spoke to missing elements of their norm including their school, teachers, *direct instruction, hands on learning,* and the *familiarity* of in person learning. All the youth described missing the ability to be in a physical classroom with their peers and teachers. For some youth, not having their teachers in the room with them made it difficult to ask questions and to feel motivated to learn. Others, who identified the need to be physically present in the classroom and to use more varied learning modalities, struggled to feel engaged and longed for "hands on learning" in a social context. Youth discussed the struggle to grasp concepts and engage in the material online alone.

Maddy spoke about missing direct instruction and not seeing her teaching sharing that, "Not seeing her is kind of a stress because your like, some of the work you don't understand as well without her." Maddy's experiences highlight the longing for learning in a social and relational context with her teacher and peers.

For Sam, certain classes came with more challenges related to not having direct instruction and he described:

> I think having a teacher like I said earlier I think that was one of the main things I kind of almost missed about some classes. Like as far as being in my chemistry classes I think having a teacher there is more, like I think it benefits me as a student more to have them there whereas at home it's a little bit harder.

He later explained the critical nature of teachers and their role sharing:

> I can see the benefits of having a teacher, 'cause they give you what you need, where as a computer, you can always type it in but it might not be exactly what you need, it might be like slightly off from what you need, a teacher I find is just precise and yeah.

Tegan explained:

> It's kind of like I learn from like seeing things hand done and stuff or like I like when we did like science projects or power points and stuff like that and now we don't really get to do that anymore so we like don't get to do science or experiments or so that's the one thing that's kind of hard and not having the teachers to explain the stuff or like not asking my friends and stuff for help or getting to see them.

These two participants missed the relationships with their teachers and the ability to clarify and understand concepts fully with their support when in person learning.

Even Bella, who was becoming quite acclimated with learning at home and the mental health gains it was providing her learning from the safety and security of her home, described the difficulty. In describing what was most helpful for her and her learning she said, "A lot of going over things and visual learning so being able to actually see what I'm learning which has been a little bit of a struggle because I can't constantly see what they're trying to explain." Learning

online was difficult for most participants to engage all their modalities because it was focused on presenting lesson plans and completing written assignments. This limited the amount of opportunities for open clarifying discussion, hands on examples, and visual demonstrations.

Learning Impact Follow Up Interviews

A year later, the four youth were contacted for their follow up interviews. After experiencing a number of shifts and changes throughout the year with curriculum delivery and social distancing measures, they offered in depth accounts of their experiences over the last year and their present circumstances. At the time of the follow up interviews, the city in which the youth resided in was seeking to lower COVID-19 case counts by adopting a 50-50 learning model, where students attended school in person every other day and virtually on alternate dates. While Sam and Tegan were participating in this form of learning, Bella and Maddy were able to utilize a unique hybrid model of synchronized learning, which allowed those with necessary learning accommodations to attend in person full time while the remainder of students simultaneously learned virtually 50-50. Two overarching themes emerged for youth during the follow up interviews including *rushed learning* and *new appreciation for in person learning.*

Rushed Learning

Half the youth spoke about the theme of rushed learning. This phenomenon was described by the youth as an emphasis put on them throughout the year, in spite of the delivery shifts, to continue a fast-paced delivery of the curriculum. Youth connected this to feeling as though they were *missing content, feeling behind, and feeling ill prepared for the next year.* For example, Bella shared with animated enthusiasm:

> Our motivation is so low, but the work is coming so fast that you're putting like as much as you can remember into projects and into assignments, but as you're like just finishing

> your last assignment new information is coming at you. So it's kind of like us learning how to do things as fast as we can but not doing it well. Like say the first thing, I think it was like a factory where they produced SO MUCH [emphasis], but the quality is terrible! [light laughter].

Rushed learning felt like a focus on checking tasks off a list rather than a process of engaging and learning the material for youth.

Difficulty of Online Learning

Upon follow up, all the youth stressed upon the difficulty of learning online as they reflected on their year. When their initial interview summaries were read to them, several of them commented on the different perspective they had developed throughout the year.

Bella described:

> Umm I honestly I thought it was hilarious when I said that it was easier for online learning because I took a complete 180 and it's ok very difficult now, but I think at the time it was kind of it was almost like a honeymoon phase or like it's like everything good and I was like always, basically a vacation and you know it was easier because I was in the comfort of my own home and I could work at my own pace. But then, like as it went on, especially into this year it was difficult to keep up and stay focused and in fact, I had to up my ADHD meds because my ADHD was getting really bad which did not help.

The difficulty of sustaining attention and interest online was a huge challenge for many students. The initial novelty had supported some motivational processes but reverting back to the online approach at this phase of the school year proved to be extremely detrimental for youth.

Maddy shared:

> It was really hard to like stay ahead when I'm at home because, well, I had siblings and it was just really easy to get distracted and umm it was just harder to focus like I even had trouble focusing at school.

And later adding:

> I think it affected me because like I, I had never done it before like the first time so it was really new to me and it was different, so it was it was kind of difficult I guess the first time because, like it's something completely different.

Difficulty of online learning was categorized by having a hard time keeping up with the world load, feeling ill prepared to understand the concepts, struggling to remain focused and motivated, and a sense of "throwing in the towel."

New Appreciation for In Person Learning

As youth reflected on the challenging year, that was occupied by numerous changes and transitions, they expressed a new appreciation for in person learning. They spoke about not "taking things for granted," developing new and different perspectives, and gratitude, as they referred to their in person learning experiences.

Maddy said:

> Well actually it did kind of affect me in a good way because it sort of letting me know not to take things for granted I guess, like going to school it's not fun, but it can be better than online learning. So it kind of taught me that…it's just way better to be in person and you shouldn't take it for granted I guess.

Tegan explained:

> Uh, I think being at school is definitely a lot better than being at home and then just like if we're doing something hard, like examples going through the work and then having someone explain it to you really well helps a lot with me learning.

Youth developed insight into how in person learning supported their learning and well-being and how they were genuinely worried about the possibility of ever having to return to full time remote instruction.

Appreciation for 50/50 and Synchronized Learning. While Sam and Tegan were participating in the 50-50 learning model where students attended school in person every other day and virtually on alternate dates, and Bella and Maddy were participating in the hybrid model of synchronized learning, they all expressed an appreciation and improvement in their new learning conditions in comparison to initial emergency remote instruction period. This appreciation and improvement was described by the youth as motivating, supportive, and less stressful.

Bella said:

> But doing learning in person and being able to grow everyday really grew that motivation because it's kind of like pushing me to do it because I have to instead of doing online where I'm kind of just sitting there like listening, it's just like blah blah blah blah blah. So being able to go in and get ready for my day and going to school motivates me and makes me almost like energized, I would say.

When Tegan described how now being able to attend school in person impacted her, she explained, “Kind of keeping me sane ‘cause I can like get out of the house. And learn and you know, see some of my friends some more. Being in a new environment.” Youth emphasized how

important and beneficial in person was for their academics but also their overall mood and well-being.

COVID-19 Mental Health Impact

My research sought to explore the influence of the COVID-19 health pandemic on youth mental health and well-being as they navigated unprecedented learning conditions. During the initial interviews all participants' mental health was impacted by the initial stage of COVID-19 emergency remote learning in 2020. *Stress, worry,* and *missing friends* were three overarching themes identified by participants.

Stress

All the youth described an overarching theme of stress in their current circumstances. For them stress involved their "minds going a million miles per hour," fidgeting, having too many things to do at once, feelings of fear, and dwelling on the past. Many were *overwhelmed* by the adjustment to a different learning platform, while others spent their time at home *overthinking* and *stressing* about this new normal, as they attempted to adjust to emergency remote learning in 2020.

When describing his daughter's experiences recently, Maddy's dad shared:

> As for her mental health wise like I see it uhm, she's had some, a little more down time where she feels a little bit more down and emotional you know where, this sucks I can't see my friends, my life is over, like the whole exaggeration that adolescents or preadolescences do sometimes.

He later added "She does feel a constant pressure because she said like she feels so stressed out that she can't get all her work and she doesn't know what to do, uhm it's almost like a, probably an overwhelmingness." Another participant, Sam explained, "Like I would say it definitely, like

uh it kind of exaggerates everything, but like I might have been a little stressed in like school, but I can definitely like tell that I'm stressed at home like [inhales with pause]."

Bella shared her experience with overthinking during emergency remote learning sharing, "It's a lot of time to just sit and think, which just isn't the best sometimes…personal life, a lot of overthinking things, a lot of missing things and quarantine...um, not school, but the social aspect of school, so being with people." Bella's mom reflected on the increased anxiety and stress in her daughter describing:

> I would say its different types of anxiety, because her anxiety has definitely gone up. We actually talked about it today, this afternoon, that her, like just in the last about two to three weeks her anxiety has really gone up, but I've asked her if it's from school, and she's like 'no, like it's not at all because of school.

As an educator, Sam's mom shared a noteworthy perspective describing:

> Well, I would say, because I see fairly in tune with most kids, I would say that anxieties are up, anxieties are although again anxiety is another thing that has been on the increase of 25 years of teaching. But I would say I have never seen anxiety levels like they are right now.

Tegan's mom described the impact of her daughter feeling behind in school during the initial interviews and the worry of contracting the virus explaining:

> Yeah, it's stressful. I think it's probably the anxiety. She was doing well [pre pandemic] and I think that might be part of the problem because when you're used to doing okay and loving school like she enjoyed school and now she doesn't have that anymore and it's not as enjoyable.

The parents in this study offered a unique perspective of what they were seeing in their children's moods, emotional experiences, and well-being, noticing signs and indicators of increased stress. Emergency remote learning and the unfolding health pandemic disrupted youths' lives in many ways including their mental health. Having to adjust to new ways of learning, not seeing friends, not knowing what the future held, and being forced to spend all their time at home, youth were consumed with feelings of overwhelming stress.

Feeling Down. While youth's stress reports were centered around increased anxiousness associated with overthinking and overwhelm, the overarching theme of stress within the parent interviews also spoke to "*feeling down*." It became apparent in the parent interviews that parents were observing an increased sense of low mood and motivation, and feelings of sadness in the children in conjunction with a sense of "*depression and grief*." Maddy's dad said:

> As for her mental health wise like I see it uhm, she's had some, a little more down time where she feels a little bit more down and emotional you know where, this sucks I can't see my friends, my life is over, like the whole exaggeration that adolescents or preadolescences do sometimes.

With many of the changes to day-to-day life, youth felt a sense of grief and loss associated with face-to-face contact with friends and peers, routine, and interrupted and cancelled extracurriculars and milestone events like graduations and birthdays. Bella's mother, for example, discussed grief and loss as she said:

> You know that whole, it's like grieving a loss, it's the same thing, and so it's very difficult for teenagers to try and navigate the equivalent of grieving, right, but that's really what it is. But she was very open about talking about where her anxiety comes from is her trying to, she used a term today, she said, 'trying to take care of myself' and

> so there comes anxiety about trying to take care of yourself and finding a time and a way because all of the things that we would normally do to take care of ourselves, go to the gym, go to a movie, go out to eat, like so many of those things have been taken away, so how do you find, and I was like, you know, 'maybe you could go for a walk' you know, like not today.

Life as they knew it had changed for youth; this meant adapting to the new demands and pressures of learning and life but also experiencing the many losses associated with the pandemic.

Worry

Worry was a consistent theme for all four youth during this time. For youth this meant overthinking about different aspects of school but also the COVID-19 virus and its health implications.

School Related Worry. All of the youth expressed school related worry during the initial interviews. This involved dwelling on thoughts of what and how much school content was being missed or under learned, not understanding and retaining curriculum concepts, and what this meant for their grades and future school years. For example, Sam said:

> I guess like I've been thinking about is we are missing things that might affect me in grade 12, so I am kind of trying to tell myself you've got to work twice as hard next year to learn everything because I think we have missed a few things and in some classes I think that like a three hour class every week or whatever that the government has recommended. So I think we are missing a little bit so I have kind been like throughout the whole pandemic I've kinda been like telling myself next you've got to work really

> hard to get everything done because you missed have missed some of it so you need to work hard in those.

Another participant, Tegan explained:

> Sometimes I have little problems with the work, but now it's like I am kind of worried 'cause they don't have the teachers to explain the work to me and walk me through the classes that like I might mess up and then like my grade will be affected.

Not only did youth spend a lot of time worrying and thinking about how their learning was being affected in the present time, but also the future and how it would be affected because of this.

> Preparation for the upcoming year was a major worry for Bella who shared:
>
> I'm a little worried about that just because since school has been cut off, all of our preparations and the last few months of school we were really going to start talking about grade 9 and since that's all been cut off, we haven't really talked about. So yeah, I don't feel like I'm going to be super ready.

Maddy shared, "just worrying that I will like fail my grade or something." Maddy's worries also centered around awaiting the development of a new school as she shared:

> Well, it's hard because we can't really see much people anymore so, yeah and we are like, we don't even know when we will go back, that's the sad part. And we are like going to a new school soon and that's like not built yet because they had to postpone it because of the pandemic I'm not even sure.

The uncertainty of the pandemic left youth inundated with unanswered questions about what their future looked like, as feelings of worry and loss replaced what was once excitement for the future.

Health Related Worry. While some of the youth expressed expected curiosity and worry about the unknowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, one youth in particular experienced tremendous health related worry. This was described as worrying about contracting the virus and extreme caution around not contracting the virus. Tegan explained, “because I notice with this whole COVID thing I have become a lot more paranoid.” Worried about contracting the virus and becoming sick she said, “Kind of like I have been like wanting to like to disinfect everything or stuff that doesn’t need to be disinfected and sometimes like you just want to stay away.” This extreme caution and worry resulted in excessive hand washing as she explained, “Washing my hands has become like a big problem, not a big problem like I was my hands like a lot with stuff that [pause].” Her mother added:

> She’s quite paranoid like it’s, it is concerning, just because it’s the focus everywhere. It’s just on that so, I don’t know how to explain it, all this is really stressful for her. I think because she’s older and really understands.
>
> Later in the interview she provided context for her daughter’s worry explaining:
>
> And I’m in a higher risk group, I’m diabetic so that I think worries her. Even to go outside she’s paranoid in the neighborhood …or just um having people bring things to our house, even groceries and stuff, she gets pretty paranoid. It’s not in a helpful way, she’s only thirteen.

Youth in this study worried not just about school-based work and the grief associated with missed social opportunities, but also about other people in their lives and how acquiring the virus could impact them.

Missing Friends

All the youth were experiencing the social impact of provincially mandated social distancing measures at the time of the initial interviews. With restrictions limiting contact with those outside the home and schools shifting to emergency remote learning, access to their peers and friends was far from what they were used too. For example, Sam explained the change in the contact with friends stating:

> I definitely see them a little bit less, well there is less human connection, I almost even feel like there is a little bit less if you took pre-COVID times when you're talking to them in school and stuff like that.

Another participant Tegan, quickly and concisely shared early in her interview "I do miss my friends." Her mom also observed this longing stating:

> Yeah like even seeing, we live on a busy street, we see walkers and we live near the bike path so even seeing kids together on their bikes, like a group of six to seven kids, that kind of makes her miss it and she's kind of mad because well they're not social distancing but I think it's more like she wished she could.

Tegan's mother later described encouraging her daughter to connect virtually with friends explaining, "I did tell her. I would prefer her to do it more often, yeah. All of them are really missing their friends and that's the biggest impact is no friends." Without the ability to socialize in person, connecting with friends looked and felt different for youth and while they were able to virtually connect it did not replace the richness and value of spending time with friends in person.

Mental Health Impact Follow Up Interviews

In 2021 when the youth were interviewed again, they offered their perspective on the experience of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to their mental health and well-being. Themes

emerged related to *negative mental health, missing friends and family, long haul mental health impacts, improved stress and anxiety, and the importance of mental health.*

Mental Health Concerns

Reflecting on the last year of turmoil and change, all the youth and parents identified mental health concerns directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the year youth reported *increased stress and anxiety, feelings of sadness and depression, a sense of overwhelm, and school related worry.*

Increased Stress & Anxiety. As youth discussed the past year, they noted moments of *increased stress and anxiety*, expressed as ruminating and worrisome thoughts, intense emotions such as fear and overwhelm, and physical responses such as fidgeting. Stress was typically connected to the challenges of online learning, social isolation, and adapting to constant change. Sam described his experience with change and stress over the last year explaining:

> School is probably the main one ‘cause again, it was like last year is a big shift to go from at home or start at school, which is all I knew. To completely at home. Which was a big switch and at school I'm not used to big like changes like that, which I think was a big uhh a big change.

The constant and continual changes manifested as worrisome thoughts, intense emotions, and difficulties with adjusting to new experiences during this time.

Another youth Bella said:

> So before like at the start of grade nine I was impacted pretty bad with all of them trying to focus and not knowing what to do. And it was also it was just overwhelming for me ‘cause I would constantly like I would become irritable as well around people and I hated that ‘cause I would just like snap because I was so stressed.

Experiencing so many unknowns and changes throughout the year left youth feeling more stress and anxious. This presented itself in low patience and tolerance and also outward expressions of frustration within relationships.

School Related Worry. At the time of the follow up interviews, half of the youth expressed worry surrounding their academic progress which meant worrying about their grades as well as meeting curriculum, grade-level goals, and outcomes. This was experienced as overthinking about due dates, understanding of concepts, retention, feelings of being behind, and ill preparedness for the coming year.

Bella explained her preparations for next year sharing:

> For me, I'm going to need to really focus in on comprehending what I'm learning and maybe even going back and looking over ‘cause I tend to keep my notes from past grades. So try to like go over them and make sure I know what I'm doing so that in the real world and then like when I go into university, I will be able to understand. And the big worry about is I'm going like I'm planning well and doing something in psychology like a psych major and science is a big part of that so I am having trouble remembering things in like biology and chemistry and all that which I'm going to need. So it's going to be pretty difficult for me, which is another thing I just like overthink.

Uniformed and unsure about what future schooling and learning entailed, youth were at times consumed by worrisome thoughts about the reality of their future plans and goals.

Sadness & Depression. One of the youth spoke specifically about feelings of “depression”. For them depression was connected to decreased motivation and an inability to focus on schoolwork. While the youth shared this, she also offered that as an “above average

student" who obtained good grades but who often went undetected even when she was struggling to concentrate and feel good about how well she was doing academically. Bella said:

> My depression's been super like on like also roller coaster during this so when it gets really bad and completely stops. Uhm, I have a really hard time being motivated during those times, so it's kind of just like sitting in bed and only doing the bare minimum in school. Which is like apparently great for teachers. Which is why I fly under the radar because my standards and my bare minimum is just I guess average per student I guess you would say if that makes sense.

Her mom added:

> The last six months have been pretty hard, but she's been getting some counselling and she did actually have like a clinical diagnosis of depression this year, so she has started some medication as well, so we'll see how it goes.

Signs of deteriorating mental health such as feelings of sadness and depression may present themselves through an array of behaviors that may not always be detected in the academic functioning of youth.

Missing Friends & Milestones

As the province experienced one of the most strenuous social distancing mandates in the country, all the youth expressed a deep longing for their friends and socially expected milestones such as graduation, celebrations, and traditions. The social isolation of not being able to interact with peers, friends, and extended family impacted youth negatively through increased feelings of *stress, sadness, and isolation and loneliness.*

Maddy said:

> I really miss my friends at school, and I miss hanging out with people when I can or like in my free time… the hardest thing was probably Christmas or like any traditional celebration, you wouldn't be able to see family or friends and do things how you would like in normal, like without a pandemic. Which was really hard ‘cause it was really hard not to do like some of the same things that you would do and miss out on it. It would just not be as fun and I don’t know just… sadder.

Because of the significant deterioration in her mental health, Maddy’s dad decided to pivot, he explained:

> We shifted also a little bit in our adherence to the rules, to allow for a little bit of flexibility there because I'd rather be fined than have my child harming herself, that was kind of the point where I realized that academics aren’t that important and neither is adhering strictly to rule when I'm seeing my children suffer, so at that point I was like no, we need to change and we also looked into, obviously, other ways to be helpful for our children. And I had a big talk with them and things like but all this online schooling and being away from their friends and stuff like that, really really was hard.

All the parents spoke about the isolation and longing for friendship and connection their children were experiencing. Feeling that the risk of not being flexible with social distancing measures was far greater than the alternative, many parents relaxed their adherence to the strict provincially imposed social distancing measures.

Tegan’s mom described:

> It was just disappointing because where my teen goes to school they have like a little graduation ceremony and stuff when they’re leaving grade 8, and that was different, so she was just really disappointed, so we had to find other ways for her to celebrate that.

It was difficult for parents to notice how hard it was for most youth to not experience the big, anticipated milestone events like graduation, safe grad, sporting events, and holidays. For youth, these disruptions to events that once brought them so much joy and comfort and for those they had long awaited it was tremendously grueling to make sense of. Friends, milestones, and traditions are an important aspect of their lives that they look forward to and without them they felt sad, lonely, and anxious.

Friendship Appreciation. In experiencing bouts of social isolation and longstanding time apart from their friends and peers, three of the youth expressed a new appreciation of the friendships in their lives. The pandemic offered them new perspectives on the quality of their friendships as they withstood time apart and the importance and role of close connections in well-being. For example, Tegan stated, “I'm definitely seeing like who's really trying to, you know, be involved and trying to connect even I these hard times. Uh, like seeing who's really there for you has been really good for friendship wise.” While the imposed social distancing measures were meant to keep people physically apart, they revealed youth’s deep sense of appreciation and importance of those who creatively found ways to remain involved and connected.

Long Haul Mental Health Impacts

All the youth’s parents spoke to the toll that the prolonged exposure of the pandemic had taken on their social, emotional, mental, and physical health. This exposure included experiencing multiple shifts in learning platforms, adapting to new roles, extreme social distancing and quarantine measures, and experiences of heightened fear, worry, and uncertainty regarding the virus and the future. Sam’s mom, an educator herself, offered her observations of her own children and her students explaining, “The kids have been holding on to all of those

things now for a year. Such prolonged period of stress and uncertainty and change and trauma and just family flux that is happening all the time." Bella's mom said:

> There was a lot of stress coming out of the school year and then the summer, like, it just felt like they were being robbed of everything and little did they know they were going to be robbed even more. So the summer was hard on her mental health, the summer was hard. We had a, she had a couple times she was in the crisis unit.

This resulted in feelings of burn out, and adapting rules and expectations regarding schooling and provincially imposed social distancing measures.

Tegan's mom explained:

> Like the kids today, they wanted to play with the neighbors, and the neighbors are fine with them playing together even though we're not allowed to be in each other's yard, and I'm fine with it. I'm just, I had to have that moment like, can I afford a $1200 fine? But I was just like, go ahead, like I'm not even worried, but yeah, so it just looks like I just don't want to do any of it anymore and I'm not like an anti-masker, I'm not against it, I don't think it's a conspiracy, none of that, I'm just tired.

Navigating the social and emotional costs of the prolonged stringent social distancing rules to their family was a difficult process for parents after a year of the pandemic. For many, the social cost of public perception, government enforcement, and penalty were outweighed by the tremendous toll the social distancing rules had taken on their children's mental health for so long.

Improvement in Stress & Anxiety

After reflecting on the difficulty of learning throughout the pandemic upon being reinterviewed in 2021, all of the youth were reporting an improvement in their levels of stress

and anxiety. These improvements were accredited to youth's own personal development and learned strategies, loosening of social distancing measures and quarantine restrictions, and the return to normalcy. For example, Sam said:

> I feel like since I had that experience last year of like being at home the whole time and a lot of stress, I feel like it's gotten easier for me to cope with like I have this this and this do so I feel like I've actually been given the ability to kind of cope with stress a little bit better. Which has for sure helped my mental health like as far as if I'm stressed or not.

While Maddy explained:

> Well, yeah, probably it has been less stressful lately. Not being online and having the option like of help and stuff. It has been way better and less stressful to get work done 'cause we always have like that extra period at the end of the day to get any unfinished work done, which is a help. And we have like more resources at school and stuff so it's better all around and just less. Especially since I don't need to take care of my siblings during the day. 'cause like they're in their own class and they they're doing what they're doing.

The return of the social familiar, the development of personal skills like independence and determination, and the adaptation of schools and families contributed to youth's well-being after a year of turmoil and change.

Additionally, the assurance of safety protocols and vaccination roll outs alleviated the worry and preoccupation of one of the youth. Tegan said:

> Taking the safety measures and just getting really just getting used to it up has gave me more peace of mind now…Yeah it has like just adapting to the way things are, has really

> helped me calm down [with enthusiasm] ... I don't know how mental health wise just I think I just naturally like improved over the year.

It was helpful for youth to have access to emerging peer reviewed, scientific research that offered trustworthy information regarding the COVID-19 virus, as they navigated the many unknowns of the year. Additionally, the development and roll out of the vaccination elicited hope for the future and the return to normalcy for the youth.

Importance of Mental Health

Two of the youth emphasized prioritizing mental health as a learning point for educators from this unprecedent time, speaking to the importance of recognizing and considering the mental health of youth, families, and even teachers. This was seen as checking in on students' well-being, asking how students were doing, and inquiring beyond their academic progress.

Bella shared:

> I would say a big thing, and I've talked, I talked about it a bit, but just like a big thing is making sure you're checking up on people. even like, not just like teenagers and kids but adults because I feel like they don't talk about it as much or if they do, it's very secretive. And just being able to like not be ashamed if something is going wrong because I feel like everyone is having something go wrong.

Having frequent, open, and honest conversations about mental health and well-being contributes to youth's perceptions of safety and normalization. Good learning involves good mental health, so it is critical that educators prioritize and pay attention to youth and how they are doing not only during times of "global stress."

Youth Individual Competencies

Hoping to better understand what individual level adaptive systems were vital to promoting their wellness and resilience during the COVID-19 health pandemic, youth were asked to reflect on their personal attributes and coping strategies in the face of adversity. Youth generally offered these personal reflections with humility and reluctance to acknowledge their strengths.

Personal Attributes

The youth were insightful about the interpersonal competencies and qualities that supported their well-being, and that supported them in their successes and challenges. They described personal attributes such as their *determination, independence,* and *perspective.*

Tegan said, “And then with schoolwork I am kind of just like staying determined. I have just been trying to finish up my work and keep on schedule.” Bella said:

> I would say I’m pretty independent with most things. But when it gets to a point where I start panicking, I want to be independent, but I also know I can’t because I need help, so it doesn’t always work out. So I try to be as independent as I can, which works most of the time.

Sam said, “I don’t give up that easily.” Youth’s awareness and utilization of their own internal strengths were useful to them in times of challenge and difficulty.

Coping Strategies

Youth described the coping strategies that supported them in navigating difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, citing several relaxation techniques such as *breathing, music, distraction, physical activity,* and *relationships* as important strategies that facilitated their resilience and well-being.

When asked what helped Maddy when she was stressed out, she explained, “Well, I uhm listen to music sometimes, just [sigh] calm down, take a breath.” Sam relied on the power of music sharing, “I’ve always found that when I’m stressed a little bit I like listening to music, because music in general has always been something I like listening to and stuff like that.” Bella described, “I use distraction a lot, so going and doing something I enjoy or trying to get my mind off it with that or going to talk to someone, maybe my mom probably.” Bella further shared relationships were important for her coping sharing:

> Well, I focus a lot on relationships, they’re huge for me. So friendships, romantic relationships, family relationships. I focus a lot on that, so being able to communicate helps a lot. I enjoy helping others, so helping others almost helps myself because it makes me feel like I can do something, so that works a lot.

Interestingly, relationships served as a form of distraction, connection, and positive communication when faced with hard times.

Three of the four parents emphasized the importance of physical activity for their children, especially during the time of quarantine and isolation. Maddy’s dad explained, “She wouldn’t admit it, but she always feels better after she gets outside and takes the dogs for a walk or something” adding the observable benefits he noticed:

> And she wouldn’t admit it helps, but she visibly looks different when she comes back sometimes and visibly feels different. Like you can see it you know, when she goes, she’s all grumbly and unhappy and maybe wasn’t the best day and maybe even argued early because she was completely negative the whole last two hours but then she will come back, and she will just be so much happier and refreshed.

Getting physical and outside in nature was a great way for youth to cope with their stressors and also engage with the world outside of their homes during strict isolation periods.

Youth Individual Competencies Follow Up Interviews

While the youth showed an innocence and humility around acknowledging and discussing their individual traits and internal capacities in the initial interviews, they demonstrated a confidence and self-awareness when exploring them with the researcher in the follow ups. Having navigated a year of tremendous adversity and change, the youth developed a greater understanding of their own personal qualities and strengths.

Personal Attributes

All of the youth identified a growth in their *independence* over the course of the year. For one, this meant obtaining employment and navigating the challenges of government-imposed health restrictions and safety polices in the workplace. For other participants, independence meant relying on their own resources to problem solve, while for others it included taking on new roles and responsibilities. For example, Sam said:

> I feel like a lot more like now more so compared to earlier. So like it's a lot more of me [emphasized] solving that problem rather than me going looking for help to solve that problem. And I actually think that's probably changed, like since even the beginning of the pandemic and stuff like that.

The pandemic period challenged youth to trust themselves to make wise choices and solve problems on their own in the face of challenging situations and increasing their sense of independence.

All four of the youth also emphasized the role of their own *determination* and *perseverance* in overcoming adversity. This was described by the youth as being “hard

working," "trying their best," "adapting and overcoming," and having a "strong focus." Maddy shared:

> Some of my strengths umm could be if I know something really well then I won't really give up on it. I'll just continue to move forward. I won't really downgrade I guess I just know it and I'll like get to it until it's done!

Another youth Tegan explained, "Oh, I think like perseverance, you know, always trying to you know adapt and overcome. That's helpful. And just like you know, just waking up and just being like yeah I'll try schoolwork and I'll try my hardest." In spite of obstacles youth learned from their failures and distress and to try again as they pursued tasks, goals, and passions.

Coping Strategies

While youth identified several similar self-regulation and relaxation strategies that they referenced in the initial interviews such as *breathing*, *music*, and *physical activity*, it was of interest that a reoccurring theme emerged in the follow up interviews once again relating to their resilience. Three of the youth highlighted the role of *relationships* as supportive mechanisms in their coping. Having experienced several instances of intensive provincially mandated social isolation, youth emphasized the importance of relationships in navigating challenging and difficult situations. Tegan shared:

> Uhm [pause to think] like when facing a difficult problem like in general I asked for help but like with COVID I kind of have my little like freak out moment then like then I get like reassurance and stuff that things will be ok and that helps.

Maddy said:

> When I'm having a lot of stress and I'll usually wanna like see my friends or talk to them or something. They usually make me feel really better and get my mind off of things for a

> bit. But other than that I can I call my friends ‘cause I can't really see them all the time because of COVID. And uhm, it just makes me feel better to see them.

Having relationships such as family and friends that they could turn to during these times was important to their well-being. Relationships offered them an opportunity for distraction in the face of stress, but also close connections to talk and receive reassurance from.

COVID-19 Family Dynamics

The family system fosters resilience and promotes good mental health in youth, acting as a buffer in protecting children’s mental health and development (Masten, 2014a). During the initial interviews with youth and parents, families were adapting to emergency remote learning from their homes and families were being ordered to follow provincially mandated social distancing measures. For many people, this resulted in limited contact outside of their households and increased time with family members within the confines of their homes, revealing themes associated with *new roles* and *increased irritability.*

New Roles

Half the youth spoke about the new roles that were being assumed within their households, both of whom were the eldest siblings in their family and had younger siblings also navigating new learning platforms. Additionally, for these two, their parents continued to have to physically go into workplace leaving the youth to take on new roles and responsibilities. Bella said, **“**I have a younger sister, so it’s usually babysitting her a lot of the time, my parents do have to go into work.” Maddy’s dad described his daughter’s supportive role with her siblings in adapting to emergency remote learning sharing:

> She has more responsibility now… for example this week and next week it’s all full time and it’s all everyday all day and so, how that looks different now is because before when

> she turned 12 or whatever she was doing some of the before and after school care, just getting off the bus with the kids you know after I left. But I already saw them, I already made sure they were dressed neat and everything so, before she's been doing a little bit of the before and after school stuff a more of a responsibility there. And now she has all day for at least 50 percent of the time, if not more… there's more responsibility there for sure with managing the house and relationships and stuff.

Maddy's dad also said, "so, she's got her own pressures on her to kind of keep the household going a little bit too." The changing routines, schedules, and demands of families meant youth needed to take on new roles, and responsibilities such as helping their siblings with the learning, babysitting, and even taking on new household chores.

Juggling responsibilities. Most commonly parents discussed juggling responsibilities between their jobs, parental responsibilities, and these new educator roles. Sam's mom explained:

> because I am expected to be working from home and the boys are up at 9 and sitting at either the computer or their binder or whatever by 9:15. And then getting engaged…the problem or the challenge is I kind of get absorbed in my own work, and I don't look up from my own work to see what they are doing or not doing. So yeah, I have got to remember to look up more.

Bella's mom described her family situation stating:

> I'm still working, and their dad is still working as well. He's not working as much, and I did go down to part time at my full-time job, I was put down to part time. But then I needed to pick up another part time job in order to financially make ends meet.

Being pulled in many directions, Maddy's dad said:

> There are at times that it is busier for sure, absolutely because uh just two days ago I got a called from my daughter at lunch hour and had to a video conference with her and show her how to do some math and some other things during my lunch hour.

Managing their own working and parenting responsibilities, parents were now expected to take on new roles and responsibilities as in home educators, making it difficult to manage their time and energy effectively.

Parental Overwhelm. Taking on new and sudden roles often led to parental overwhelm. For example, Maddy's dad said:

> I would say that it's been different roles that we've had to play right now which has complicated things a little more and trying to take over more of the schooling responsibilities, seems to have put a little bit more stress on the parents. Like ourselves it's not always easy to try to figure that out too, uhm because I mean we have other stresses going, as well working, we're in the pandemic as well we have four children, we have a lot of different stresses, it's made it, maybe at times a little more tense at home.

Tegan's mom spoke about the strain of not feeling equipped or prepared to support her daughter during emergency remote learning sharing:

> Just because the level of work is a little bit harder so I can't always help her. Like I don't know what the math is she's doing, I don't remember. I haven't done that in 30 years. The things they, the way they do math and stuff I don't know these new methods, so I can't help her and then she's got to wait for the next meeting with the teacher which might be two days or three days or just kind of whenever the teacher can schedule her in. There's not enough one on one time with the teacher, she falls behind.

Managing parenting and work responsibilities, supporting online learning, and managing their own emotional experiences during a global pandemic when changes were imposed and tremendous uncertainty was ongoing led many parents to feel, not surprisingly, overwhelmed.

Increased Irritability

With increased time together and little opportunity to socialize outside of the family unit, the families were beginning to feel the toll within their dynamics with one and other. Three of the four parents spoke to levels of increased irritability among family members. Tegan's mom shared:

> I think we're all so sick of each other, like we've never been so close to each other…I think it's just us all being on top of each other like nobody has their own space, nobody can just go and be by themselves and get some alone time. And then the thirteen-year-old I've had to take her devices away from her, her phone and her tablet away from her at night because she was up all night. She'd get sensitive and be sneaking and being on her phone all night and waking up just miserable.

Bella spoke with kindness in explaining, "I'm also with my family all the time, which I love them, but being with them 24 hours of the day can be stressful." Her mother would later mirror the sentiment stating:

> The downfall has been the dynamic sister to sister, there has been some struggles with the sisterhood in the family for sure, not having a break from each other. …Yeah, so spending lots of time together without having a parent around, there's some struggles there. There're some power struggles for sure.

Maddy's dad described the increased irritability amongst the siblings saying, "Uhm, you know sometimes a little more bickering lately but it's because they see each other all the time."

And he also spoke about the impact of the parent's increased irritability within the home explaining:

> If my wife for example is more tense and she's struggling a little bit more with things than I find it that I'm a little bit more tense. And when we are little more tense were a little bit more irritable, the communication breaks down a little bit more, you know we have a little bit more of a chance that when your daughters comes back sassing and really giving a lot of attitude that you might, you might be inclined to be a little bit angry back.

To no surprise, with nowhere to turn or escape to, families became sick of one another's company leading tensions to run high and conflict to arise amongst family members.

Family Dynamics Follow Up Interviews

During the follow up interviews three major themes related to family emerged including *family closeness, increased independence,* and *parental overwhelm.*

Family Closeness

All four youth spoke about family closeness increasing over the course of the year. This was discussed by way of *increased family connecting time, sibling closeness, creative approaches to connecting,* and *new traditions.* For example, Tegan said, "I spend more time with my family and that's good…we go on like bike rides and walks or more often and we like watch movies on weekends together as a family, and that's pretty good." Her mom added:

> I think it's helped we spend more quality time together…like movie nights, and like going for bike rides and stuff like that because we have no choice there's nothing else to do. Making our home a lot more comfortable, spending more money on things like outdoor toys, making our yard nice, things like that, so they have things to do at home.

While tensions and irritability ran high for families during the initial interviews, the follow up interviews revealed that time spent connecting with one and other was filled with more joy and enjoyment.

> Bella described the benefits of quarantine and social distancing measures sharing:
>
> We've gotten a lot closer. Because we've been stuck in the house together. So it's almost like it's awesome because we don't have that privacy, which sounds not great, but it's the truth ‘cause I can't just like go over to a friend’s house…but I can't go anywhere else right, so I'm constantly with them. And we've found, like ways to do things together or like do things we didn't do before COVID. Like we used to go on like walks all the time and then we stopped, and I guess we just got lazy. But then COVID happened, and we started taking walks again. Or we started like going out to places in Manitoba that we had never been before for just like a day trip.

She also offered insight into the closeness that developed between her and her mom sharing:

> All of my family like my mom, my dad, my sister and I we all have very busy schedules. So before COVID it would be like school to volleyball or swimming lessons and then supper and then homework and then this that…but since everything had closed down there was nothing to do, so everything slowed down and I think it actually impacted my mom the most because she is on a lot of councils and a lot of committees. She does a lot of work and when that all slowed down she was able to be us more and be able to like really connect with us. Which we already had a great like connection and relationship but just being able to like her and not be constantly rushed to do things really helpful.

Forced to slow down and enjoy the pandemic’s gift of time and togetherness, families revisited old hobbies and also found new, creative ways to bond.

Bella's mom said:

> I think I'm closer with the girls than I was before. We were always very close anyways, but I think that I mean obviously we're kind of in each other's faces a lot more even with, like, I was working from home quite a bit, I still am. I do work from home quite a bit, which has been good from like helping with school, or just being around, I think like the simple things have been more fun, so like planning a fun afternoon out within COVID restrictions has been more fun than what it might have been a couple years ago, so.

Now forced to spend time together and be close, families found their relationships with one and other improving as they connected over new and old shared interests, novel adventures, and traditions.

Increased Independence

With youth adopted to new roles during the COVID-19 health pandemic and the several delivery modes of learning throughout the year, a sense of increased independence was noted by three of youth. This meant developing new problem-solving skills and greater senses of autonomy as they took on new responsibilities. Sam said:

> I feel like a lot more like now more so compared to earlier. So like it's a lot more of me [emphasized] solving that problem rather than me going looking for help to solve that problem. And I actually think that's probably changed, like since even the beginning of the pandemic and stuff like that.

Tegan excitedly shared, "I take the city bus to school. So that's been like a new thing for me. Kind of getting more independence this year." When asked what that experience was like for her, she explained, "Uhm scary at first, but now it's like made me feel like more of an adult like independent especially keeping safe on the city bus like with COVID and just in general." An

opportunity to do things youth may not have done before the pandemic, proved to support youths' own skills, sense of competence, and independence.

Having spent a greater portion of the year supporting her sibling's online learning, Maddy said:

> Wellllll, I think it's probably changed for the better, and now I can like, I know what to do if my sibling is like not behaving as well, I would know how to help them better than before. Uhm so it's pretty ok for responsibilities it taught me more I guess yeah. I have been helping a lot with siblings or like we have two dogs and three geckos, so I've been helping a lot with them, all of that, I guess. And just like helping my parents do chores or if they need help with something then I will be there I guess.

As youth learned to take on more responsibilities within their household, it offered them a sense of competence and pride in their independence skills.

Parental Mental Health Strain

As the year went on, and youth transitioned through several different learning platforms, social distancing measures shifted and changed, and parents navigated their new roles, their mental health was strained. This was felt by feelings of overwhelm, changes in mood, increases in irritability and frustration, and lower patience and tolerance. All the parents spoke about the impact to their own well-being and mental health, often described as overwhelm, stress, burn out, and helplessness. Tegan's mom said:

> It was really just sheer willpower, like just keep on the kids and just do it, just push through and get it done, like we were all pretty crabby, pretty grouchy, it was not a pleasant experience while we were going through it which was unfortunate, it just made it unpleasant for us all.

Parents noted the impact this had to their relationships, their family dynamics, and their role as caregivers. Maddy's dad explained:

> Yeah, I think, like for parents as well, like at the start we tried so hard to do like lots of activities with the kids and do everything, and as time goes on it wears out, you know, you don't do it as much. Kids don't want to do as much, you don't want to do as much, whatever. You start to feel less inclined to do activities together... It's been more stressful for parents too, like myself and my wife, we feel more stressed as time goes on you feel, it's almost like a hopeless feeling.

As expected, mental health strain was experienced in parents as it was in youth after a year of prolonged social distancing measures and adapted remote learning. Taking on too many roles and responsibilities, with little support and resources for so long, left parents feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and, in some situations, hopeless.

Adaptive Systems & Processes

In attempts to uncover and understand the resilience that occurred during these unprecedented times, youth's ecologies and process-oriented contexts were explored (Masten, 2001). Understanding how and what supported youth well-being and learning during COVID-19, drives my investigation of youth resilience, growth, and development during adversity, hence school, family, and community were investigated. Interviews revealed themes relating to *supportive parents, connected teachers, and family school collaborations.*

Parental Educational Support

All the youth and their parents identified a significant adjustment in roles as they adapted to becoming educational supports to their children as they learned from home. This meant

supporting them to adjust to remote learning through the implementation of routines and monitoring and checking in on assigned assignments. Maddy's dad said:

> trying to monitor them a little bit during the day but then trying to make sure when I am at home that we get some of the schoolwork handed in and done and figured out what we are going to do for the next day.

He also described, "I think the responsibility is shifted a little bit and now parents, myself included, are more responsible for my child's education…I feel more of the weight than for providing uhm guidance and assistance with the educational process." Sam shared:

> My mom has been helping me. Like she's definitely been, I'm almost actually caught up now because she's kind of given me a goal for each day, including the weekends now, of stuff that I have to get done and so she kind of in sense has become the new teacher.

Parents experienced the added pressure and responsibility of their children's education as they took on new educator roles supporting their children's day to day learning.

Tegan explained the support her mother provided her during this time "Yeah my math teacher gives us like a notebook full of the notes in the booklets she gave us and I ask my mom for help." Bella's parents took a pivotal role keeping her on track she described, "With home it's the same. Mom, dad, trying to make sure I'm getting my work done, really focusing on seeing if I'm ok. It's been a lot of actually doing things together, which has helped a lot." All of the participants shared the ways parents supported their learning by monitoring, checking in, clarifying concepts, and even co-working beside their children during this novel period. Parent's creativity and commitment to these new supportive educational roles helped youth adapt to the changes and difficulties of emergency remote instruction.

Routine. Parents were supporting youth to develop and implement daily routines and structure, they offered organizational help, and academic guidance. Three of the four youth identified their parents as helpful in supporting their new routines. Sam, who relied on his educator mom's expertise, described, "she's very organized and she is kind of a voice of authority I guess and so she really helps me when it comes to getting stuff done and staying on track and organized." Another youth, Tegan, described her mom's routine help and the importance of snacks sharing:

> Well my mom, came up with a schedule for us, which it has been helping like a lot, like we get up usually around 9:00-9:30 and then we get ready, we pack our school snacks, just like before. So we can like keep on track, 'cause when you're at home you kind like tend to eat more because there is more snacks and stuff that you can binge on.

Imposing structure and keeping familiar routines was helpful for youth's motivation, organization, and time management while remote learning.

Parental Educational Support Follow Up Interviews

One year later, youth continued to depend on the support of their caregivers in navigating their unique learning contexts. Two of the youth reported that at least one of their parents was their primary educational support. By way of routine and structure implementation, monitoring assignments and due dates, and time management, parents continued to take on the role of educators in their family. For example, Sam explained his mother's support sharing, "Yeah, so she kind of helped me do everything as far as organization at that time. Got me back on track." Managing assignments, due dates, and breaking large tasks down was difficult for youth to do on their own while learning from home, thus parents played a critical role in supporting their learning during this time.

Teachers

Youth's perceptions of their school relationships and views of belonging and connectedness within the school environment play a vital role in well-being (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018). In many instances youth spend more time with their teachers than they do their parents and so, to no surprise, maintaining connected supportive relationships with them was important during these times apart. During remote learning youth stayed in touch with their teachers by way of video calls, virtual classrooms, and email messaging.

Connection & Engagement. For most of the youth, teacher connection and engagement played an instrumental role in their well-being and resilience during these unique circumstances. With physical distance between them and the familiarity of the classroom, youth were grateful to have teachers connect with them virtually. This meant teachers going the extra mile to reach out and check on students and coming up with unique and creative ways to make youth feel connected and tethered to their schools. Bella reflected on the importance of teacher connection sharing:

> This year I've actually had pretty great teachers, there's just been a couple incidents where I haven't been able to learn very well, but for the most part my teachers have been super supportive and helpful reaching out to me during this. My gym teacher [soft laugh] he's my favorite teacher, he's always texting me asking me how I am, through Teams. So they reach out a lot, making sure we're ok.

Bella's mom elaborated on this connection and engagement as a motivator for her daughter describing:

> She's been very engaged with her teacher. Like I know she has been, she's been on every call, she goes into every presentation because she wants to stay connected with her teacher and her teacher has been really good with using the online platforms.

Another youth, Tegan, was excited to share the creative approach to engaging students her school took after not seeing each one and other for two months explaining, "Thursday last week my school did a parade for the kids, like a teacher parade and that was [inaudible] it was super fun." Her mom added "Pretty much every day she's in contact with somebody from school." Out of the box efforts were made by school staff not only to sustain curriculum delivery but also to maintain a positive school culture and make youth feel connected to their schools while they were away.

Sam's mom, who was an educator herself, offered an interesting perspective and insight into the importance of connection sharing:

> The longer I am at it, the more I have come to realize that if you don't have some sort of relationship with a kid, nothing is, no kid walks away learning things or with positive self-esteem which is as a drama teacher is one of my non hidden curricular outcomes.

Connection and engagement played an important role in maintaining youths' sense of belonging to their schools, classrooms, and teachers. Feeling connected and a part of something supported youth in their motivation to learn and participate in their studies during this unique period.

Lack of Mental Health Support. While youth elaborated on the importance and value of the efforts made by their teachers to connect and engage them throughout this time, a theme of lack of mental health specific support emerged amongst three of the four parents. This included not having teachers ask about mental health specifically, not having contact from clinical school

staff, and not having adequate supports and resources during this time. Bella's mom felt a disconnect between the school specialized supports sharing:

> One thing, like she doesn't have a good relationship with the counsellor at the school, but if she had of, you know, maybe the school counsellor could have been on Teams, you know and reaching out to students that she already has connections with or just the students in general. Because we haven't had a lot of mental health resources sent to us through the school.

She later expressed:

> There's such a lack of consistency between what schools are doing and teachers are doing and families are doing that there's such little direction. So the one thing that is consistent is the conversation around mental health, so I think if the school division wants to do anything in the name of consistency, then it should be around mental health.

Parents were frustrated with the inconsistency and lack of mental health support being offered to them during a time of great need. It was unfortunate that relationships with clinical support staff pre-pandemic were observed as being determinants for pandemic involvement, leaving many youth unaccounted for and unsupported.

Tegan's mom hadn't received any contact, information or resources from the school pertaining to mental health support. She said:

> Maybe more resources directly from her school, like maybe the school counsellors should check in, just the different teachers, the different staff should be checking in with the kids. Because I can't think of like, when you say resources, I can't think of one for the kids who are having a really hard time right now, like I think they are the most impacted they have no control over anything, and I couldn't think of like…yeah I couldn't think of

> who can I call at the school division if she's you know, feeling anxious just to help, somebody for her to talk to outside of the house.

Feeling helpless and lost on how to support their children's mental health, parents need educators of all kinds to be connecting and considering mental health during this time as a priority.

Lack of Structure & Consistency. The immediacy, and unpredictability of the imposed home learning mandates left educators and families trying to figure out emergency remote learning with little to no guidance and direction. This meant learning looked differently from everyone including sibling groups. Differences were seen in the platforms, schedules, learning plans, and communication approaches. This *lack of structure and consistency* was felt and noted by most of the parents who described feeling overwhelmed and confused by the differing processes. Tegan's mom said:

> Like it would be nice if they could come up with like a standardized way of like…how are we going to communicate, let's all communicate in this way, right across the board from like kindergarten to grade eight. Like they do with the report cards, like report cards are all the same, something like that.

She later noted the many differences in delivery approaches sharing:

> It's really hard to find where it is, because every day she also meets somewhere different and does something different it's like ok today we are meeting in the math channel and doing math, and tomorrow we are meeting in the teams channel and doing teams, and next day we are meeting in the English channel and doing some English and so I'm struggling to figure that out and to work with, like where is the file that I need. ok so do I print this file, or what area do I go in, it just doesn't seem as user friendly. So that just gives you a little bit of a perspective I guess on the different ways that teachers are

> handling it, very different, yes and each one of those comes with their own unique challenges.

Keeping up to the complex demands of remote learning was difficult for youth and their parents, especially in the case of multiple sibling households and while teachers were left to their own "devices" in implementing emergency remote learning, families longed for simplicity.

Bella's mom discussed diversities and inconsistencies across families and schools sharing:

> These kids are all over the place because every family is different, like Bella said she has kids in her class that have never even picked up their work from week one and I know, she knows somebody too who has never done any work at all, and so families are all over the place, like there's such a lack of consistency between what schools are doing and teachers are doing and families are doing that there's such little direction.

Parents were desperate for some form of consistency and structure, as they supported their children to navigate very confusing schedules, platforms, and learning experiences.

Lack of Feedback & Individual Support. Two of the parents also noted the lack of feedback and individual support being offered to their children. Parents felt that direct virtual contact with teachers was limited and so their children were unable to check in and clarify concepts as they learned them. For example, Tegan's mom said:

> The way they do math and stuff I don't know these new methods, so I can't help her and then she's got to wait for the next meeting with the teacher which might be two days or three days or just kind of whenever the teacher can schedule her in, there's not enough one on one time with the teacher, she falls behind.

Maddy's dad openly discussed his daughter's teacher's approach sharing, "It does lack induvial instruction a little bit. Maddy can go to her for help if she needs, but she is reluctant to ask for help. She's finding that difficult especially now." During a time of significant change and difficulty, individual support and teacher feedback was greatly needed but limited. For those who were afraid to ask for help or who worried about burdening their teacher's during this stressful demanding time, this was even harder and left them feeling unsupported and unprepared.

Teachers Follow Up Interviews

As the pandemic unfolded, youth experienced new and unique ways of learning and engaging with their teachers through different periods of remote instruction. *Connection and engagement* once again played a vital role in youth's well-being and learning. This meant having *access* to their teachers, feeling understood and accepted by their teachers, and having their mental health acknowledged and prioritized. Interestingly, this sentiment was mirrored by youth, who recognized the toll the pandemic had taken on their educators and their mental health, as noted in the theme of *teacher impact.*

Connection & Engagement. Teacher connection and engagement once again emerged as a theme in the follow-up interviews for all four youth. As the youth learned to navigate and adapt to the difficulties of the last year, feeling supported and understood by their teachers was important in facilitating their well-being and resilience. This was achieved through creative approaches to connecting throughout the several periods of mandated social distancing measures and remote learning, as well as through positive school environments, and understanding relationships. For the youth, this also meant feeling having their mental health acknowledged and considered so that they could feel safe being vulnerable about their struggles. For example, Bella said:

> The teachers I feel like kind of notice and understood a bit more of what's happening to the students ‘cause I've been getting feedback. And one of my teachers is my French teacher, and he's so understanding that like I can just go to him and say like I'm having a really hard day. And he'd be like, ‘ok, you know that's fine, like we're not gonna you know put a lot of stress and weight on you today like I totally understand.’ And what he does in his class is if something isn't for marks, but he still wants us to, you know, like learn and understand he'll do it with us.

Adopting a trauma and mental health informed perspective was experienced as supportive and helpful by youth, additionally parallel processes such as co working and setting realistic expectations were appreciated noteworthy strategies. When youth feel understood and supported by a trusted teacher they want to learn, even in the face of challenge and difficulty.

Youth noted the value of the creative approaches to engagement that were taken on by their teachers and schools to keep them connected and engaged. Three of the youth highlighted the effort that their teachers had made to adapt to their virtual platforms by making the learning experiences interactive and engaging. This included using Teams channels, chats, supplementary learning videos and resources, mental health resources, due date and assignment trackers, expressive and creative assignments, and other unique virtual features.

Accessible. Two of the youth cited that they felt that their teachers had been very accessible during the last year. Teachers made themselves accessible both virtually and in person in order to support youth as the navigated learning during the pandemic. For some, this was a matter of helping youth by staying after school or during lunch hour, others it was providing additional support through video chats. Sam said:

> Honestly, it surprises me the amount that a lot of teachers respond back…Like I think the support given by being able to respond is nice… sometimes like I'll send messages at like seven o'clock at night. Sometimes teachers will respond, which is quite surprising to me.

Youth appreciated, but were surprised by, the teacher's commitment and efforts to make themselves available, as they went above and beyond their roles to help them in their learning.

Teacher Impact. Half of the youth and three of the parents spoke about the impact of the pandemic on teachers, this included acknowledging that they were *adapting and learning* during this time, that they were experiencing signs of *burn out,* and *lacking guidance and support*. Youth empathetically related to teachers' experiences of stress and adaption and felt that they were not receiving adequate support and guidance, particularly during remote learning periods, and that as the students adapted and adjusted so did the teachers. Sam explained, "I feel like on both ends it was pretty hard, especially last year when we were doing 100% at home all online. Yeah, I think everyone had to kinda adjust. Teachers, I feel like did a pretty good job." Sam's mom provided a unique perspective as an educator on the toll that the last year had taken on her. She explained:

> I can't wait for this year to be over. I need this year to be over. I'm tired, I'm sort of done with it all. I will certainly, this summer, kick back in a, I thought last summer I was ready for the break, I thought that with all of the things I was so looking forward to summer, I am looking forward to it like tenfold this year. Just, it's been a long year, it's been a difficult year.

Other parents offered their observations of the impact to their children's teachers, Maddy's mom said:

> I think teachers are having their own struggles to be honest and it's been probably more difficult for them to support students because they probably have a lot of students that are struggling and they're struggling themself I'm pretty sure, you know, they have had to adjust and figure out a way to teach differently and they haven't been given very much guidance in a lot of ways. There's no rule book on this either.

With little to no guidance and support, teachers were tasked with creatively adapting to unfamiliar territory over the course of the year and their efforts and exhaustion did not go unnoted by youth and their parents.

Family School Collaboration

Family school collaborations were explored in the interviews as a means of better understanding the adaptive systems and processes which promote the process of resilience for youth. Family school collaboration involves communication, coordination, and collaboration between parents and teachers, regarding youth's learning and school involvement. Participants' understanding of family school collaboration processes was limited to communication between parents and their teachers. There was variance amongst the participants regarding family-school communication and collaboration during the initial interviews. While a majority of youth felt that *communication had increased* between their parents and educators, there was reports of *limited or lack of communication.*

Increased communication. Most of the youth felt that communication had actually increased during the initial interviews. The increased communication was seen as positive, promotive, and supportive to families enduring these changes and facilitating youth well-being. Typically, communication took the form of telephone calls or email exchanges. Sam said:

> I would say, even though my mom is a teacher, she has been talking I think a lot more about other things like that with some of my teachers. I think that is something that has happened a lot more, I think that it kind of is helping me.

When asked if he found this helpful while emersed in emergency remote learning he shared:

> I think at home I like it, I never really used to like it at school because it was almost embarrassing to me to have her to talk to them but I think now because she is kind of helping me it kind of gives me a sense of I don't know someone's with me through this and that I can do it.

Although it can be awkward and embarrassing for youth to have their parents communicating with their teachers, youth are able to put these feelings of discomfort for the benefits of them coming together to support their learning and progress.

Bella was grateful for the communication and collaboration occurring between her parents and school sharing, "It helps a lot because then I don't have to be confused with other teachers thinking different things or I've had different teachers contact each other about saying is she getting her work done, how is she doing." Bella's mom said:

> Her homeroom teacher emails us quite regularly, not as much as before, but regularly enough, like now that we've kind of settled into a routine and then she has another teacher that teaches math and science, and she emails us just kind of when she needs to…We hear from the teachers more than we did before. Yeah, I mean a lot of it is like direction on this is what we're working on or whatever it may be. And at the beginning there was like a lot of emails on what like this is what we're doing now, this is how you log into this.

Increased communication with schools and teachers offering guidance was helpful for parents as they took on new roles supporting their children's education.

Maddy's dad also spoke of the communication explaining:

> Well all the teachers have provided like ongoing kind of emails and stuff like that since the start which has been good because some correspondence how some things will look is good. But I have advocated separately to each of their teachers and talk because I find education very important, and I find that having some structural normalcy in the kid's life also to be support for their mental health and for their well-being and for the fall too it's going to help them. So, a number of ways that I think it will be helpful to keep up with some schooling, so I have been an advocate and talked to each of their teachers about ways to improve and, I also complemented them on the things they are doing well of course.

Increased communication and collaboration was a process that was initiated by not only teachers, but parents who emphasized the importance of advocating for their children's learning and mental health needs.

Lack of Communication. While all parents spoke to the diversity amongst individual teacher's approaches with regards to collaboration and communication, one parent in particular spoke about the complete lack of contact during this difficult time of transition. Tegan's mom explained how she had not had any contact with her children's teachers, and she expressed her hope for increased contact stating, "It might be nice if the teachers could arrange that the parent teacher conference that would be, impossible time wise for each teacher to be checking in with the parents." This parent's wish was fueled by little hope, as she felt that teacher demands were just too pressing for them to accommodate any modicum of collaboration or communication.

Family School Collaboration Follow Up Interviews

Following up from the initial interviews, youth were once again asked about family school collaboration over the course of the year. While three of the youth identified that having communication and collaboration between their parents and schools had *benefit*, the same amount of youth shared that there was *limited or a complete lack of collaboration* occurring throughout the year. Parents' experiences offered a deeper understanding of these youth observations and some unique perspectives on increased contact with teachers during this time.

Lack of Collaboration. Three of the youth shared that they felt that collaboration and communication between their parents and teachers was limited. Some of the youth explained that teachers only communicated with their parents if something was going wrong at school, or if additional support was needed. For example, Maddy explained her dad's advocacy despite the lack of collaboration stating, "Well, I don't think they really talked too much, but I know my dad knew that I was having a hard time and I think he might have tried to help a little like talk to my teachers." Collaboration and communication between schools and family based on reporting difficulties and challenges limits the potential for recognizing and utilizing youth strengths in promoting their academic success and well-being. Often privy to the challenges being experienced by their children, but also their individual strengths and qualities, parents play a fundamental role in their children's learning by advocating for family school collaboration.

Helpful Collaboration Experiences. Three of the youth were able to reflect on positive experiences they had had when collaboration took place between their parents and their educators in the past. Collaboration resembled direct contact from the teachers to their parents via email, phone call, or in person meetings. Typically, this was in relation to when youth reported feeling intensified stressors or challenges. Youth highlighted the support and benefit

that parent teacher collaboration offered in navigating these challenges and implementing solutions. Sam, whose mom worked as a teacher in his school, said:

> I think like, uhm, like my chemistry teacher, like last semester, I felt like it was more this semester, but she would talk to him like he's got this due whatever, and even if it was ‘cause I really again, like I said, cram it all in one night. She'd tell my mom that it's due in like let's say five days or something like that. Uhm, I’d have to work on it this night this night this night. So then it wouldn't be as much cramming.

Involving parents in planning and structuring out of school routines can be helpful for youth’s time management and organization.

All of the youth’s parents agreed that parent teacher collaboration was beneficial to their children. For several of the parents, this looked like connecting with one and other about assignments and due dates, particularly during online learning. For others, it was helpful to be able to have a connection with their children’s teachers in order to feel as though they have a connection with their children and their learning. Maddy’s dad shared:

> I think it’s also when teachers touch base with you personally in an email, and make themself, even if it’s just once during a term, just say, hey, I’m Maddy’s teacher, just want to introduce myself and say hi and whatever. I really appreciate being able to connect with a person…that makes a difference, it does, because when I don’t know and I’m not able to talk with somebody, even via emailed very well, it’s really hard. I find that I have emailed teachers here and there about various things, and that’s been helpful, and they’ve been helpful too for the most part.

Simple efforts made by teachers to reach out and introduce themselves can strengthen working relationships with parents and improve future interactions.

Increased Collaboration & Communication. Contrary to the youth consensus that parent teacher collaboration was limited over the course of the last year, three of the four parents felt that collaboration had increased. From the parent's perspective, they were receiving appropriate and timely information, typically via email regarding the shifts to curriculum delivery, upcoming deadlines, and updates on their children's progress. For example, Bella's mom shared:

> Lots of emails, like the teachers have emailed the parents with, you know, kind of classroom updates, not as much as the younger ones, but I have heard from all of Bella's teachers at some point. Like as in an email to all the class, and then when we needed to reach out to somebody, they were always quick to respond with help or clarity on something, like, so they were good via email. And of course, the school itself has been emailing lots about changes or whatever, there's been no shortage of communication that's for sure.

This difference in perspective can be understood by the limited perceptions of family school collaboration and virtual communication. While youth may not have been aware, their teachers and parents were adapting to virtual communication and coming up with ways to support them in times of change and difficulty.

It is important to note that one parent described that since the onset of the pandemic collaboration and communication with the school and teachers had actually decreased. As she experienced a sense of disconnection from the ongoings of her child's learning, she explained:

> There's really no communication at all from the schools. Whereas, you know, if it was normal circumstances, you could just call up, or you'd be going in, you'd be picking up your kids and stuff like that, and there's none of that.

The pandemic brought on additional challenges with family school collaboration, making it difficult for this parent to reach out and remain connected to their children's learning during this time.

Hope & Motivation

In understanding the function of hope and motivation in promoting youth resilience in the face of adversity, participants were asked about what hope had meant to them and its importance (Nelson, 2008; Walker et al., 2012). Youth understood hope as having an "optimistic mind," looking forward to something, and having faith and a positive attitude that things will get better. For example, Maddy said:

> Hope is like having a certain feeling that you'll, well, you're like you're looking forward to something, but like you're really hopeful that something good will happen like you're like you know that, well you don't know, but yeah. You think that it will be good and you're hoping that it will.

Youth described the critical role of hope as a function of motivation and optimism during the difficulty of the last year. Bella described the importance of hope during these unprecedented times sharing:

> Yes, very important! because I think I get this a lot from like my mom and my dad but the idea that like if you don't have hope you're not helping the cause. Like if you don't have a positive outlook on something you're not contributing, you're almost like a bystander watching someone get beat up right? So you're not doing anything.

In the context of so many unknowns and adversities, hope served as a powerful resource for maintaining and positive perspective and motivation for a positive future.

Hope was essential to youths' well-being and mental health, in spite of the obstacles and uncertainty of the COVID-19 global health pandemic. Maddy's dad advocated, "I think it affects our overall health, our mental health, our physical health, our everything. It runs within the core of our being…so I try to maintain as much hope as I can." Hope is a positive motivational construct that engages many parts of our being and experiences and having adult role models and relationally encouraged hope can be useful for youth as they learn to harness their own hope.

Increased Motivation

Participants noted the influence of hope on motivation, the links to good outcomes, and successful academic experiences. All the youth shared that at the time of their follow up interview their motivation had increased in comparison to the onset of the pandemic. Youth explored the role of goal directed energy and pathways such as hope as encouragers and motivators to meet their goals. These included making plans for university, making plans to safely spend time with friends, being in a work conducive learning space like the classroom with supportive peers and teachers, making small achievable goals, and fun and exciting plans for the future. Sam explained his method to success and motivation sharing:

> I think like creating goals for myself, whether it's big or small, like, say, say with just cleaning the house like just as an example feel like knowing that once I do this it'll look good and look visually appealing. I feel like setting goals is probably something that was fairly good for keeping me and like having me able to succeed a little bit.

Another youth Bella, emphasized the importance of classroom learning for her motivation sharing:

> But doing learning in person and being able to grow everyday really grew that motivation because it's kind of like pushing me to do it because I have to instead of doing online

> where I'm kind of just sitting there like listening, it's just like blah blah blah blah blah. So being able to go in and get ready for my day and going to school motivates me and makes me almost like energized, I would say.

Motivated and propelled into actions by their own goal developments and pursuits, and goal conducive environments, hope played a vital role in motivation and served as a powerful tool for youth as the pandemic unfolded.

Hope & Optimism for the Future

In the unpredictable and uncontrollable circumstances that the youth experienced during the first year of the pandemic, hope and optimism for the future offered meaningful anticipation for a life sans social distancing measures, remote learning, pandemic related mandates, and the stressors that resulted. As an internal resource, hope and optimism for the future was referenced by all four of the youth as a *hope of normalcy.* With a national vaccination roll out on the horizon and further innovation and evidence-based protocols to safety being adopted youth were experiencing an elevation in hopefulness for the future. Spirituality, parental influence, and perspective taking were also cited in promoting and adopting hope for the youth. For example, Tegan said:

> Umm you know, like a hope like this will go away eventually. And like with vaccines coming out, that has given me a lot of hope that things will soon go back to normal quicker…well outside of school, I think I would like things to be more like open in the future being more safe. Everyone being like vaccinated. And you know, being able to see friends.

The anticipation of seeing friends and family, experiencing socially expected milestones and family traditions the way they once did, returning to extra curriculars, and the familiarity of learning in a classroom consumed youth with hope for the future.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The purpose of my study was to understand how youth with learning and mental health concerns in Manitoba were experiencing the COVID-19 health pandemic at two different time periods while schools were significantly impacted by public health protocols. Furthermore, this study sought to gain in-depth, multi-perspective descriptions of the complex adaptive systems and processes within youth's experiences, in order to more deeply understand and facilitate resilience and positive development in the future. This final chapter will offer a discussion of the research findings. Additionally, limitations of the study and implications for research, theory, and practice will be explored.

Summary of Major Findings

Major findings from this thesis offer an in-depth investigation of the experiences of four youth, by way of understanding their potentialities and protective factors in spite of the adverse COVID-19 health pandemic. The five overarching case propositions described in the previous chapter will be used to address the research questions at hand. Findings revealed challenges and strengths associated with learning and mental health, alongside numerous promotive and protective factors necessary to buffer against the adversities of the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be further useful in supporting on going youth development and well-being. By way of understanding resilience as a dynamic process that occurs within and across a youth's interacting systems, several supportive processes and adaptive capacities emerged such as family, school, and hope (Egeland et al., 1993; Rutter, 2012; Wright & Masten, 2015). Exploring this invaluable information qualitatively illuminated the rich and meaningful experiences of youth during COVID-19. The findings complement existing research on youth mental health and extend our understanding of this unique point in history.

COVID-19 Learning

Youth's experiences of learning were unique and unpredicted as they adapted to several modes and approaches of remote and blended hybrid learning methods. As youth experienced these shifts in learning their lives were disrupted and impacted across all domains of their functioning. Already positioned in vulnerable stances as youth learners who are experiencing increasing rates of mental health concerns and learning and behavioral difficulties, it is necessary to understand the processes necessary to facilitate good mental health and well-being in the face of unprecedented adversity.

During the initial data collection period, youth were submersed in the initial emergency remote learning stage which was marked by unplanned approaches to delivery and learning of curriculum. Youth, families, and teachers were all adapting to uncharted territory and thus, left to their own discretion in order to pave this new pathway to education. All the youth in this study expressed challenges associated with emergency remote learning and they all reflected on missing elements related to their once familiar in person classrooms. Concerns related to school challenges due to the interruptions of emergency remote instruction within the literature highlighted disengagement, impacted motivation and time management, and increased academic worries (Cohen et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Lessard & Puhl, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Save the Children, 202; Scott et al., 2021). Offering a lived experience perspective, youth within my study complemented this emerging literature as three major themes related to challenges arose, namely, impacted focus and motivation, overwhelm, and difficulty asking for help.

These findings further expanded on the research of Adair-Gagnon (2020), Bates (2021), and Thompson and Thompson (2021) who recognized the lack of adaptation and change to teaching goals and methods, and the relearning necessary by educators to provide adequate

online classrooms. Meant to provide a temporary substitution to learning during an emergency such as the pandemic, emergency remote teaching in this case resulted in negative consequences for youth. Furthermore, the implications of not being physically in school had a negative impact on the youth in this study, from missing the social aspect with the peers and educators, to the familiarity of their learning conducive environment, to the ease of connecting with a teacher for clarity and assistance with academics.

From a Positive Youth Development and Relational Development Systems perspective, the dynamic processes and bidirectional exchanges which operated for youth during these unprecedented conditions revealed many strengths and potentialities (Benson et al., 2006; Lerner, 2009; Overton, 2015). Remote learning resulted in positives and strengths for youth in some instances such as being able to self-pace and incorporate flexibility into their schedules. Not having the distractions of the classroom, or the expectation of the structured school day, and teacher implemented task switching were also found to be helpful for some. The ability to exert independence and autonomy in their day-to-day learning proved to be an important finding from this study. This flexibility adhered to the individuality of the youth's needs and well-being that is often captured in the literature (Thomson, 2010). This is an important takeaway for educators and policy developers when reimagining education, as we enter this stage of the ongoing pandemic and work towards a post pandemic world. While the youth struggled with motivation and focus, there were elements of self-directed learning that offered youth the opportunity to make their own decisions about their day-to-day structure and learning. With adequate management monitoring, assessment, collaboration, and evaluation, remote learning has the potential to promote significant resilience and growth promotive factors for youth (Thomson, 2010).

It is important to highlight that at the time of follow up interviews, two of the youth were participating in the 50-50 learning model where students attended school in person every other day and virtually on alternate dates, whereas the other two participated in the hybrid model of synchronized learning allowing them to attend in person everyday while their peers participated in 50-50 learning. Two overarching themes emerged for youth during the follow up interviews, including rushed learning and new appreciation for in person learning. To no surprise, after experiencing tremendous shifts in learning platforms and long-standing periods of remote learning, youth emphasized the difficulty of learning online. While educators were able to become more familiar with their online classrooms, delivery of curriculum virtually still made learning challenging for the youth in this study. The inaccessibility of direct individual support, the lack of structure and consistency in scheduling and curriculum delivery, the difficulty of keeping up with the workload, and trying to understand and retain concepts was experienced by youth.

The fast-paced nature of delivery resulted in loss of curriculum content amidst the pandemic and created tremendous pressure and overwhelm for youth. Missing curriculum content, feeling behind, and feeling ill prepared for the next year became themes which youth described. Reflecting on the toll and difficulty of online learning, youth emphasized their new appreciations for in person instruction and its role in increasing their motivation, feelings of support, and gratitude. While schools transition back to in person learning, it is of importance that long haul impacts of pandemic learning be explored, considered, and mitigated for future success. To date, no qualitative research has emerged relating to emergency remote teaching quality from the youth and parent perspectives, although 85% of Canadian teachers report concerns with this period of education (CTF, 2020).

My research emphasizes the role of schools as crucial ecologies in which youth are embedded in in order to cultivate resilience and growth in spite of adversities and challenges. Schools that recognize and adapt to youth's developmental needs (autonomy, relatedness, support) have been found to be related to increased achievement, motivations, behavior, and emotions (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Regardless of platform, learning should be delivered in a structured, planned, intentional, equitable, and meaningful manner, by which teaching goals, methods, and engagement efforts are adapted to the needs of the students. Furthermore, these findings are important for pedagogy and educational policy. As we continue to navigate the ongoing pandemic and work towards recovery in a post COVID-19 world, education must be reimagined holistically, incorporating, and prioritizing mental health and resilience at all levels of learning. Equitable educational should be central to youth experiences, while recognizing those most greatly impacted by the pandemic, educational supports and interventions need to be intentionally offered to those with the greatest needs. My study highlighted these needs by voicing the youth and parent experiences and concerns.

COVID-19 Mental Health

The developmentally prosperous period of adolescence is marked by transition, growth, and vulnerability, during which time youth are more susceptible to a myriad of mental health challenges and barriers to achieving optimal well-being (Collinshaw et al., 2010; Kessler et al., 2005; Kieling et al., 2011; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Adolescents were positioned as some of the most vulnerable people during the initial periods of the pandemic, as their day-to-day life infiltrated with disruptions (Chen et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2020; Findlay & Arim, 2020; Racine et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). Primarily quantitative, initial pandemic findings revealed worsening mental health for youth justifying the

inquiry of this study (Wiens et al., 2020). My study enriches and further contributes to the literature by qualitatively exploring and describing the initial experiences of youth during the pandemic.

Findings from my research complement international and Canadian studies which highlighted the worsening mental health conditions, described by heightened anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms in youth (Chen et al., 2020; Cost et al., 2021; Duan et al., 2020; Findlay & Arim., 2020; De France et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). The adjustment to emergency remote learning left youth feeling overwhelmed and anxious, as they navigated new territory with little to no guidance or precedence. With all the time spent at home, many youth were left with unoccupied time to overthink and worry about this new normal and what the future held. This was coupled with a sense of depression and grief that parents saw in their children during this time. As the ongoing pandemic continues to unfold, understanding youth's experiences of loss and grief should be further explored in future studies.

As the pandemic progressed and youth continued to experience turmoil and change, their mental health continued to be negatively impacted. The year was marked by increased stress and anxiety, feelings of sadness and depression, a sense of overwhelm, and school related worry. Stress was typically connected to the challenges of online learning, social isolation, and change. Worry surrounding their academics was seen through overthinking related to due dates, understanding of concepts, retention, feelings of being behind, and ill preparedness for the coming year. This prolonged exposure was marked by multiple shifts in learning platforms, adapting to new roles, extreme social distancing and quarantine measures, and experiences of heightened fear, worry, and uncertainty regarding the virus and the future.

Arguably, one of the most captured mental health consequences in COVID-19 literature has been that of social isolation, loneliness, and boredom (Angus Reid Institute, 2020; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2021; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). As the province experienced one of the most strenuous social distancing mandates in the country, all the youth expressed a deep longing for their friends and age expected milestones and events. The social isolation of not being able to interact face to face with peers, friends, and extended family impacted youth negatively through increased feelings of stress, sadness, isolation, and loneliness. Although youth were creative in their approach to connecting virtually with friends, this increased their screen time significantly and ultimately did not replace the face-to-face connection they longed for. Increased screen time alongside the suspension of extracurricular activities contributed to the youth's worsening mental health.

Friendships and peer relationships play a critical role in youth development and well-being. Extracurriculars provide the opportunity for positive connected relationships that foster and promote emotional well-being, academic successes, higher levels of satisfaction with life and optimism, and lower levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Guilmette et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2020). Thus, the negative consequences of social isolation, such as heightened feelings of depression and anxiety, pose significant risks to youth during this time (Loades et al., 2020; Meade, 2021). Relationships were recognized as important in supporting good mental health and navigating difficult times by the youth. As a protective factor in the face of adversity, social support functions as a promotor of resilience for youth (Afifi & MacMillan, 2011; Ioannidis et al., 2020). My findings contribute to the field of resilience and the role of friendship support in times of change and stress (Masten & Monn, 2015; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Mental health improvements were accredited to youth's own personal development and learned coping, school

strategies, loosening of social distancing measures and quarantine restrictions, and the return to their expected normal of day-to-day social conditions.

Interpersonal Competencies

Following a Positive Youth Development framework, I understand youth as major actors in their own development and as significant resources in enabling positive development and well-being, by investigating their unique personal attributes and resources. (Benson et al., 2006, p. 896). Previous research has emphasized the critical role of individual adaptive factors such as problem-solving skills, effective behavioral and emotional self-regulation, a sense of self-efficacy and mastery motivation for positive goals, and belief that life has meaning in promoting youth resilience (Bonanno, 2004; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Masten & Reed, 2002).

My study supported the literature surrounding the role of individual factors such as youth's awareness and utilization of their own personal cognitive, emotion regulation, and social skills. Youth's familiarity of available coping strategies such as breathing, music, and distraction techniques was apparent immediately. At the point of follow up, it was evident that youth had become more aware of their own personal attributes and strengths to survive the tremendous change and adversity experienced that year. The conditions of the pandemic offered a space for youth to manifest their potentialities and recognize their capacity for growth within such unprecedented and challenging times (Damon, 2004). Youth's newfound independence, strengthened determination, and perseverance were all noted as important factors and resources in promoting their well-being and resilience that should be drawn upon when seeking to support youth in navigating life hurdles.

From a Relational Developmental Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner et al., 2011; Overton, 2015) and Social Ecological Resilience framework (Ungar, 2012), youth well-being

and resilience is best understood from the dynamic interactions and processes that occur a multiple levels and systems in response to adversity. In response to the pandemic, it is critical that youth capacities and resources be conceptualized within the systems of care in which they are embedded and nurtured, whether this be their family system, schools, or other social support systems. These systems and processes are crucial to influencing individual psychological well-being and facilitating the restoration of hope, agency, and pathways for resilience to emerge (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Ungar, 2012).

Adaptive Systems and Processes

As described by Benson et al. (2006), a positive developmental trajectory "occurs in the fusion of an active, engaged, and competent person with receptive, supportive, and nurturing ecologies" (p. 905). This is further enabled when youth have the opportunity to participate in multiple, nutrient rich relationships, contexts, and ecologies such as family and school. As viable and critical delivery systems for positive youth development, family and school have been points of inquiry for my research. Investigating and promoting development and well-being from a comprehensive, multi-level perspective requires the uncovering of the role of adaptive processes and valued resources when youth are experiencing adversity. Understanding these ecologies and process-oriented contexts supports my investigation of youth resilience, growth, and development during adversity, hence the investigation of family and school in this study.

Family Dynamics

Understanding youth potentialities and development by way of emphasizing the relationships, circumstances, and ecologies they are embedded in, provides a context for the necessary role of "effective families" in fostering resilience and promoting good mental health (Benson et al., 2006; Masten, 2014a). The findings of this study enriched the emerging COVID-

19 literature on the role of positive parenting and good family functioning as buffers for adversity and primers for positive youth development. Provincially imposed social distancing measures and remote learning revealed an increase in family closeness through connecting time, sibling closeness, and creative approaches drawing out the dynamic process that youth and families mobilized within their family systems to navigate the adversity of the pandemic. These findings added rich depth to the findings of Pozzoli et al. (2022) and Tang et al. (2021) who revealed positive home climates and open communication between children and parents as important mediating factors of COVID-19 and difficulties in remote learning.

These times of transition also led to increased tensions and moments of challenge as family members adopted new roles, spent more time together, and parents adopted new foreign roles as educators. The pressure to assume responsibilities for which they did not feel prepared or equipped lent to negative mental health impacts for parents. The immediacy and unpredictability of the imposed home learning mandates left families trying to figure out emergency remote learning with little to no guidance and direction. A lack of structure and consistency was felt and noted by most of the parents as they adopted educational roles in supporting youth to develop and implement daily routines and structure and offered organizational help and academic guidance.

Teachers

In responding to the need to reduce the long-term impact of the global pandemic, youth mental health experiences and resilience must be understood within the context of mutually interactive contexts. Schools as an ecology offer a myriad of interactions that promote youth development and protective factors (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Contributing to the pre-pandemic findings of Aldridge and McChesney (2018) and McPherson et al. (2014), youth in this research

highlighted the critical role of connected teachers and positive views of belonging and connectedness with educators and school during the pandemic. Relationships and simple interactions with teachers offer opportunities for personal growth amidst challenging and adverse circumstances and thus, play a critical role in promoting positive mental health and academic success (Chiu, 2021; Miller, 2021). Within the context of online learning, teacher-student relationships offer a buffer against negative mental health outcomes and thus, fostering relationships with youth through creative and meaningful methods are critical strategies to promoting well-being (Pozzoli et al., 2022, Miller, 2021, Wright & Wachs, 2022).

As the youth learned to navigate and adapt to the difficulties of the last year, feeling supported and understood by their teachers was important in facilitating their well-being and resilience. During these times of change and stress, this meant feeling understood by them and having their mental health acknowledged and considered. Youth noted the creative efforts of educators and schools during the extended periods of mandated social distancing measures and remote learning, as they attempted to create positive school environments and understanding relationships. Prioritizing mental health was a great take away during these challenging times for the youth. Noting the value of recognizing and considering their own mental health and well-being and also their families and teachers. Youth noted that simple efforts, such as checking in on students' well-being, asking how students were doing, and inquiring beyond their academic progress, went a long way.

The impacts of the pandemic were not exclusive to youth and families, as teacher impact was greatly acknowledged by participants. As educators were adapting and learning during this time, signs of burn out and distress were noted by the participants of this study. As an educator herself, the one parent offered a unique perspective into the difficulties of teaching during this

time, a perspective which would merit further investigation for future research. The unusual circumstances of COVID-19 and emergency response measures revealed schools' ill preparedness for disasters such as this one. In order to ensure youth resilience and positive development, the system in which they are embedded in must be strengthened and equipped to meet and respond to the changing needs of youth within contexts such as the ongoing COVID-19 health pandemic and other expected and unexpected adverse circumstances (Masten, 2020).

Family School Collaboration

Growing evidence positions family school collaborations as central to youth academic and social emotional development and well-being (de Bruïne et al., 2014). Categorized by trust, mutual respect, and open communication, family school collaborations are essential to good teaching and youth resilience (Griffiths et al., 2020). While the positive outcomes of family school collaborations are evident in the literature, few educators receive training regarding the influence of family factors on student outcomes and how to facilitate collaboration with families (McLaughlin & Clarke's, 2010; Stormshak et al., 2016). In order for youth to do well and persevere in the face of adversity, schools, teachers, and families need to be nurtured and restored.

Findings of my study revealed a variety of experiences of collaboration and communication between family and school during the pandemic. Increased communication was seen as positive, promotive, and supportive to families during times of transition. While the youth and parents acknowledged, and even in some instances wished for more of it, collaboration was inconsistent and limited, and in some instances nonexistent during the pandemic. Pre pandemic research captured educators' reluctance to adopt family school collaboration interventions due to already overwhelming and unmanageable daily workload demands

(Stormshak et al., 2016). Thus, the lack of family school collaboration during the pandemic can be understood from the context of these findings related to ill preparedness and teacher burn out during the pandemic.

Family school collaboration should be centered around shared goals, responsibilities, understandings, and decision making and not simply only when something has gone wrong or an area of concern arises for youth (Griffiths et al., 2020). Within the context of remote learning, the pandemic, and any future adapted learning conditions, it is critical that teachers be supported and trained in applying ecological approaches which promote collaborative strategies between youth systems of care. Supporting students through this pandemic means working together, individual action alone will not be enough.

Hope

The concept of hope was central to this research as a means of understanding youth well-being and resilience amidst adversity. Highlighted in the literature for its role in positive adaption and as a protective mechanism against stressors hope has been connected with positive social interactions, self-esteem, optimism, and academic achievement (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder et al., 1997). The relationship between hope and youth well-being and academic achievement has been demonstrated in the literature (Ciarrochi et al., 2007; Marques et al., 2017; Pedrotti et al., 2008). As a cognitive-motivational construct best understood through goals, pathways, and agency, hope has traditionally been linked to the ability to uphold a positive and hopeful attitude amidst adversity (Nelson, 2008; Snyder et al., 1997; Walker et al., 2012). Hope described by youth as an “optimistic mind,” looking forward to something, and having faith and a positive attitude that things will get better, was critical to youth’s experiences in this study, further contributing to the growing hope literature.

Reflecting on the many challenges and obstacles of the pandemic and negative impact to their mental health and well-being, youth emphasized the relationship between hope and motivation and their role in positive outcomes and successes in their experiences academically. While they shared that at the time of their follow up interview their motivation had increased in comparison to the onset of the pandemic, periods of worsening mental health conditions were marked by hopelessness. The longevity of stringent social distancing measures and remote learning, the uncertainty associated with what the future held, and the resumption of "normalcy" was a factor in the loss of hope for the youth and their parents throughout the year. Linked in the literature to depression and suicidality, academic and generalized anxiety, and higher levels of depressive symptoms it is critical that hope infused practices be incorporated into the systems of care which support youth (Beck et al., 1975; Onwuegbuzie, 1998; Rosellini & Bagge, 2014; Snyder et al., 1998; Visser et al., 2013).

In the unpredictable and uncontrollable circumstances that the youth were exposed to during the pandemic, hope and optimism for the future offered meaningful anticipation for a life sans social distancing measures, remote learning, pandemic related mandates and the stressors that resulted. As an internal resource, hope and optimism for the future was referenced by all four of the youth as a hope for normalcy. With a national vaccination roll out on the horizon, further innovation, and evidence-based protocols to safety being adopted, youth were experiencing an elevation in hopefulness for the future. Spirituality, parental influence, and perspective taking were also cited in promoting and adopting hope for the youth. The youth's expected normal of seeing friends and family, experiencing milestones and family traditions the way they once did, returning to extra curriculars, and the familiarity of learning in a classroom encouraged the idea of a positive hopeful future.

Youth explored the role of goal directed energy and pathways and plans to meeting goals as encouragers and motivators. These included making plans for university, making plans to safely spend time with friends, being in a work conducive learning space like the classroom with supportive peers and teachers, making small achievable goals, and making fun and exciting plans for the future. Hope for the future and a sense of life as they once knew it was often role modeled by their parents. These findings contribute to a better understanding of youth's contextual experiences of hope and resilience, and they support the literature surrounding parental roles in teaching hope (Snyder et al., 1997).

Limitations

Findings from this study must be viewed and considered within the context of their limitations. As with most qualitative case study designs, limitations of this study are related to generalization. Contextually bound by the limits and boundaries of the case, the findings from this study are not meant to be generalized beyond the contextualized experiences of the participants (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Yin, 2003). The results of this research are reflective of the experiences of four youth from one single community in Manitoba during a very specific time period of the pandemic. While the youth depict four unique experiences, the findings of this small, purposive sample size are not assumed to reflect all youth experiences during COVID 19. Therefore, findings must be understood, interpreted, and applied within the context of the literature, theoretical frameworks, and stage of the pandemic.

The current research is embedded within a larger project thus, participants in my study were already pre-selected. While all follow up interviews were conducted by me, only a portion of the initial interviews were done by me, while the remainder were completed by the principal researcher from the larger project. While all the interviews were directed by the interview guide,

the flexibility and flow of the interview depended on the reciprocity between the interviewer and the participant. This creates opportunities for differences between interviewer styles, points of inquiry, and follow up. Additionally, I was more familiar with the interviews that I conducted myself, positioning me closer to the data on some interviews and further on others.

It is also important to note that regardless of diverse backgrounds all the youth had at least one parent who was university educated. I would be curious to further explore the implications of the pandemic for those socially and economically disadvantaged, as a means of better understanding the emerging research surrounding social economic disparity and the pandemic's impact. This is an area that is noteworthy of future research investigation.

A semi-longitudinal approach was employed interviewing participants at two different time points in the pandemic one year apart in order to explore the progression and impact of the phenomena at hand. The time intervals of the research must be considered when understanding the results and conclusions. Given the unpredictability of the pandemic, it is important the future research explore further understand the developments and experiences of youth.

Morrow (2005) describes that "all research is subject to research bias" (p. 254). While I employed a reflexive process throughout the research process requiring ongoing scholarly reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge the potential for personal bias throughout the study. My role as a researcher, a counsellor, and a graduate student, also navigating and experiencing the nuances of learning during the global pandemic, may have contributed to biases at all stages of the research.

Implications for Theory and Research

The participants in this study illuminated a range of learning and mental health experiences and consequences of the pandemic which are consistent with the emerging COVID-

19 research. The negative consequences of COVID-19 have raised the question of how to support youth resilience and implications for future scholarly investigation. Situated within process orientated frameworks such as Positive Youth Development and resilience frameworks, this study posits that the contextual systems which youth are embedded in serve as mobilizers and crucial factors in youth well-being and recovery during the pandemic. As this study has, conceptualizing youth from the belief that they have the inherent capacity for positive growth and development, instead of a "risk reduction" deficit approach is necessary to supporting youth resilience (Benson et al., 2006). Noteworthy of future research, this adoption of developmental and ecological theories uncovers the potentialities and necessary protective and promotive factors in order for youth thrive and develop.

While the emerging COVID-19 research has been grounded in a deficit perspective of risk factors and consequences, fewer studies have offered understanding into the opportunities for healthy development through a strengths-based perspective as this one has (Lerner et al., 2013). Lerner (2005) offered that the "optimistic and proactive search for characteristics of individuals and of their ecologies that, together, can be arrayed to promote positive human development across life" (p. 19). This study contributes to the growing field of study of how youth persevered and even thrived within the context of unprecedented adversity, through the investigation of their unique personal attributes and resources.

Masten (2020) calls on researchers to adopt a systemic understanding of resilience within the context of disaster and adversity research, noting the multisystemic nature of disastrous events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This present study exemplified just that, while youth described a multitude of impacts within different areas of their lives, they also noted the importance of the bi-directional interactions between their systems of care. Youth emphasized

the importance of schools and educators engaging in proactive interventions such as family school collaboration and mental health informed practices in order to promote positive outcomes. From a developmental and ecological theoretical perspective, it is advantageous to continue to investigate the factors and conditions which foster and mobilize youth well-being and recovery. Exploring the ecologies in which youth are embedded that nurture their development offers insight into the potentialities of youth development and thus, it is critical that those systems be understood and supported (Findlay & Arim, 2020). Further in-depth research into experiences of youth supportive systems such as educators, schools, and caregivers would provide more information about (a) how these systems are impacted by adversity and (b) how to best promote and strengthen these key adaptive systems and processes.

The exposure of worsening mental health experiences from this study contributes to the sparse cross-sectional findings, demonstrating the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of neurodivergent learners (Asbury et al., 2020; Asbury & Toseeb, 2023; Banerjee et al., 2020; Nonweiler et al., 2020). Current research that captures multiple perspectives on youth mental health in educational contexts is lacking. Thus, my study highlighting the experiences of youth who self-identify as having co-occurring learning and mental health difficulties contributes to the literature.

Limited to primarily adult studies, the construct of hope plays a valuable resource for youth as they continue to navigate the impacts of the pandemic and promotion of well-being. This research extends and deepens the understanding of hope in developing adolescents and children. Additionally, it responds to the recommendations of researchers such as Valle et al. (2006) who have called for further studies to explore the interaction between hope and different life experiences in order to fully understand hope as a psychological strength. My study responds

to Jiang and colleague's (2018) call for action to further investigate hope's role in specific adolescent populations such as those with co-occurring mental health and learning challenges. For those with learning disabilities, notions of hope are found to be significantly less than their peers, positioning them as ideal candidates of hope infused supports and resources in order to promote positive development (Al-Yagon & Margalit, 2018; Sharabi & Margarlit, 2014).

Methodologically my study used a qualitative, multi-informant and semi longitudinal research design in order to amplify the voices of youth as they navigated adversity. The findings from this research address the gap in COVID-19 literature which has primarily been executed through a psychiatric and clinical lens, by means of retrospective recall approaches, non-representative samples, snowball sampling techniques and quantitative measures such as online questionnaires or symptom scales (Vaillancourt et al., 2021). While international and national longitudinal studies suggested a worsening of mental health in relation to the pandemic, more research was and is needed to understand the complexity of the pandemic on youth experiences of well-being and resilience.

The employed research design of my study is extremely valuable to understanding how the pandemic truly impacted youth from an in-depth perspective. Capturing not only the youth perspective, but that of their parents, at two different time points, offered insight into the youth's lives and the many systems and adaptive capacities within their ecologies, relationships with caregivers, families, educators, helpers, and friends. It highlighted the resources and capacities necessary to supporting resilience in a post pandemic world, many of which centered around the powerful adaptive systems such agency or mastery motivation, self-efficacy, active coping, hope and optimism, and connection. The multi-informant nature of my study contributes to our understanding of youth resilience and positive youth development, by way of conceptualizing

processes and capacities from a multidimensional form of inquiry and understanding of constructs. The findings from this study extend beyond that of quantifiable data and contribute to our understanding of how youth adapted within the unusual circumstances of COVID-19. This further supports our understanding of how individual bidirectional context relations can be promoted and supported in order to enhance positive development. Further research needs to focus on the ways to bolster key processes that foster positive multisystem cascades of resilience for youth in the face of adversity (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020).

Lastly, although the phenomenon of focus for this study was experiences for youth with both learning and mental health concerns during COVID-19, inevitably the interviews revealed findings related to the tremendous impact of caregivers and educators. I recommend that future research should be conducted with this population to better understand the complex adaptive systems and processes that engage networks of systems at multiple levels to facilitate youth resilience and positive development.

Implications for Practice

The present research findings have implications for counseling and educational psychology, and provide valuable information for counsellors, educators, families, and community service providers. The case propositions of this study reveal themes and resilience factors that are important to mobilizing and restoring youth development and well-being at this point in the ongoing pandemic. Emphasis on youth potentialities and strengths within applied practices will be critical to promoting positive outcomes in order to address an emerging mental health crisis and uncharted territories (Damon, 2004). The rich detailed accounts of the youth in this study revealed ordinary human adaptive process necessary to cultivating day to day opportunities for growth (Masten, 2001). Furthermore, the findings support the incorporation of

resilience and ecologically informed practices to enable youth well-being and positive development.

Educators and counsellors should borrow from a Positive Youth Development understanding of youth potential and assets, in order to cultivate individual strengths and capacities within the context of school (Benson et al., 2006). It is critical that the unique social, emotional, educational, and mental health of youth needs be addressed in safe and supportive learning environments where youth feel a sense of belonging and connection. While the likelihood of future emergency remote learning remains unknown, it is essential that schools put into place policies and plans in order to ensure continuous high-quality learning in the face of the unpredictable. Educational interventions should be centered around not only diverse learning and inclusive curriculum delivery, but also effective communication and engagement strategies with caregivers, and interaction between students, their teachers, and their peers, in order to support student well-being and maintain strong school belonginess and relationships and school wide mental health response plans.

Recovery from the pandemic will require educational systems to reimagine learning by incorporating and prioritizing youth well-being and mental health from a social ecological perspective as essential to development and challenging the systems that contribute to the marginalization and oppression of those disproportionately impacted. This includes groups marginalized based on Indigeneity, racial and cultural identity, linguistic diversity, religion, place of birth, socio-economic status, ability, age, sex, gender and sexual orientation (Jenkins et al., 2021). The findings of my study contribute to the necessary spotlight on the role of the pandemic on existing inequalities and disproportionately affected people and communities, but

further research is necessary to illuminate the experiences of those who are generally underrepresented.

Abimbola et al.'s (2021) call to address power asymmetries permeating through all aspects of global health including education, emphasizes the necessary action that must be taken to prioritize equitable education and mental health. The ongoing marginalization and vulnerability associated with systemic inequities should be recognized and challenged to ensure organizational commitments to change and equity for youth learners. The findings of my study may further serve as a call to address persisting settler colonial education policies and practices that continue to shape youth's educational and developmental experiences disproportionately (Dei et al., 2022; Pratt et al., 2018). Research and practice must be centered on understanding and prioritizing the needs of those that have been systematically and structurally marginalized and oppressed such as Indigenous, Black, and other people of color (BIPOC), migrants and refugees, women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people with disabilities, neurodivergent learners, and Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning or Intersex (2SLGBTQI+) people. Engaging these youth voices and what's valued and culturally relevant is essential to reimagining and rebuilding during this period of the ongoing pandemic.

Youth well-being and resilience does not occur within a vacuum. It is critical that efforts to promote positive development for youth be understood from a person-process-context perspective, in which healthy youth develop in healthy systems of care, thus, mental health and well-being must be incorporated into all aspects of youth's lives. Front-line workers and educators play a critical role in supporting good mental health. As we enter this stage of the ongoing pandemic, educators must be supported to incorporate ecologically, trauma informed, mental health responsive approaches through effective strategies within the classroom. The

literature supports the enhancement of teacher training in mental health literacy in helping decrease negative outcomes associated with undiagnosed and untreated mental health disorders among young people (Carr et al., 2018).

Policies, interventions, and strategies should be centered on promoting positive mental health and well-being for all youth, not only those who display signs of deterioration or diagnosis. Additionally, youth voices need to be at the center of these efforts in order to reflect their unique and diverse needs. Youth thrive when they feel understood, supported, and connected in their relationships. This calls on counsellors, educators, and other adult supporters to ensure the prioritization of youth's basic, social, emotional, and mental health needs through connected, meaningful relationships. The results of this study can be used to inform and develop enhanced educational interventions and counselling practices for youth and their families, within the context of an ecological model of resilience that strives to reduce inequalities and promote well-being for all youth.

While the evidence is clear about the association between emotional health and learning, schools and educators continue to struggle to understand youth from the perspective of whole beings (Darney et al., 2013; Kremer et al., 2016; Montreuil, 2016). My research brought to light youth's desire and need to have their mental health prioritized and valued. Youth want their teachers, families, and supports to check in with them outside of inquiring about their schoolwork, they want to be seen and understood as individuals and not just students.

Youth systems of care, such as school and mental health services, should consider the contextual and relational processes that interact across multiple levels of influence for youth to promote resiliency. This includes going beyond only an individual-level focus and understanding youth as they are embedded in multisystem cascades of resilience which also need to be

bolstered. The findings of this study underscore the position that family is important in the process of youth learning and mental health. Thus, educators and counsellors should engage in meaningful interactions and collaboration with families to effectively progress towards positive youth learning and development. Traditionally, educators have felt ill equipped and unprepared to support the mental health and emotional needs of their studies (Neil & Smith, 2017; Whitley & Gooderham, 2016). Educators and counsellors must be trained and equipped with ecologically informed approaches which engage families and other systems of care, in order to facilitate well being for youth.

Integrating family-school collaboration with existing multi-tiered strategies of curriculum and teaching has been found to be most promising (Stormshak et al., 2016). While training and education contributes to this adoption, policies and institutions must facilitate and support the incorporation of these methods. The structural barriers that contribute to teacher burn out, parental overwhelm, and counsellor fatigue must be understood and challenged, and resources must be implemented to ensure these resilience promoting interventions.

In the face of unpredictable and uncontrollable circumstances, hope serves as a valuable resource and predictor of positive mental health and well-being (Barnum et al., 1998; Edwards et al., 2007; Esteves et al., 2013; Mahat & Scoloveno, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder et al., 1991). Families, educators, and counsellors are in the best position to infuse hope-based interventions with youth. Evidence supports the enriching role of hope-based psychotherapy interventions (Cheavens et al., 2006). As youth attempt to recover from the consequences of COVID-19, it is important that this positive internal resource be fostered and utilized.

Schools should infuse hope by way of empirically supported, tiered strategies within educational contexts by way of focused interventions, programs, and frameworks centered

around setting goals and identifying pathways in the face of adversity. Furthermore, hope should be applied beyond the individual-level of focus, in order to engage youth's multiple systems of influence. This can be done through the incorporation of Snyder et al.'s goals and pathways focused model (Marques & Lopez, 2014); counsellors and educators are in an optimal position to do so by way of encouraging hope enhancing skills and strategies and promoting hope infused contextual conditions by way of language, attitude, and mindsets with not only the youth themselves, but their families and caregivers (Levi et al., 2013; Margalit, 2010; Phan, 2013).

Researcher Experiences

Through this research process I was challenged as a researcher, a student, a counsellor, and a witness to an unprecedented global pandemic. I leaned on the reflexive process in navigating the tensions that arose while I transitioned from my role as a counsellor to a researcher when interviewing the youth. While hearing the experiences of the youth and the tremendous toll and difficulty they were enduring, I experienced the tensions of wanting to offer support, therapeutic guidance, and intervention. While I resisted succumbing to this role that felt so natural to me, I drew on my counselling skills to enhance my interview skills such as empathetic listening, structuring, and open-ended inquiry. While I embodied the position of a researcher, it may be that the interview process still served as therapeutic for the youth, in allowing them to process and express their experiences in a time of significant isolation.

As a graduate student completing my thesis which was centered on the experiences of youth learning and mental health during the global pandemic, I must acknowledge the obvious. I too was being impacted during a global pandemic which resulted in consequences to my learning and mental health. As the pandemic and social distancing measures changed, I had to pivot my own approach to my study in order to ensure research resilience grounded in ethical and

adaptable approaches in this unprecedented crisis (Suadik, 2022). This was done so by shifting from face-to face interviews to virtual interviews which allowed me to relate to the youth's screen fatigue, exhaustion, and their hopes and wishes for some semblance of normalcy.

The nature of qualitative, semi-longitudinal research can be time consuming and taxing. But it was in the process that I became aware of the magic and value of qualitative research. I was struck by the importance of capturing youth's voices to highlight the depth of their experiences in order to truly facilitate authentic, worthwhile change and growth. Like the youth, my own motivation was often challenged, and it was their stories and experiences that continued to echo through the interview, transcription, and analysis process that facilitated a pathway for my own hope and optimism. My role as a counsellor guides my research interests and values and my commitment to understanding and promoting youth development and resilience. I have learned how my passion for research and applied practice can come together and complement one and other through this work.

Conclusion

This in-depth study of the mental health and well-being of youth in Manitoba during the global COVID-19 pandemic revealed participants' experiences and major themes. The knowledge gained from this study uncovers the role of contextual influences and multi-level resources when youth are faced with adversity, serving as a way of understanding resilience as a dynamic process that occurs within and across a youth's interacting systems as we enter this phase of the ongoing pandemic. The multi-informant stories illustrated that while youth have been significantly impacted by pandemic related restrictions and responses, they have also developed richer understandings of their needs, capacities, and resources across their ecologies and process-oriented contexts.

As the pandemic continues to unfold, research must be centered on further understanding how to bolster and promote the key adaptive systems that foster youth resilience. The findings of this study highlight the many systems and adaptive capacities within the youth, in relationships with caregivers, families, educators, helpers, and friends, and in resources and capacities in order to support resilience. While adversity in this study was conceptualized as the COVID-19 global health pandemic and its multisystemic challenges, the findings and lessons surrounding the ordinary human adaptive process of resilience should continue to be prioritized as a means of supporting positive youth development and well-being even outside the COVID-19 context (Masten, 2001). Resilience is the ordinary magic which occurs within the influential relationships between youth and their multiple levels of context, and so the responsibility lies with us to uncover and cultivate the ordinary in the unordinary.

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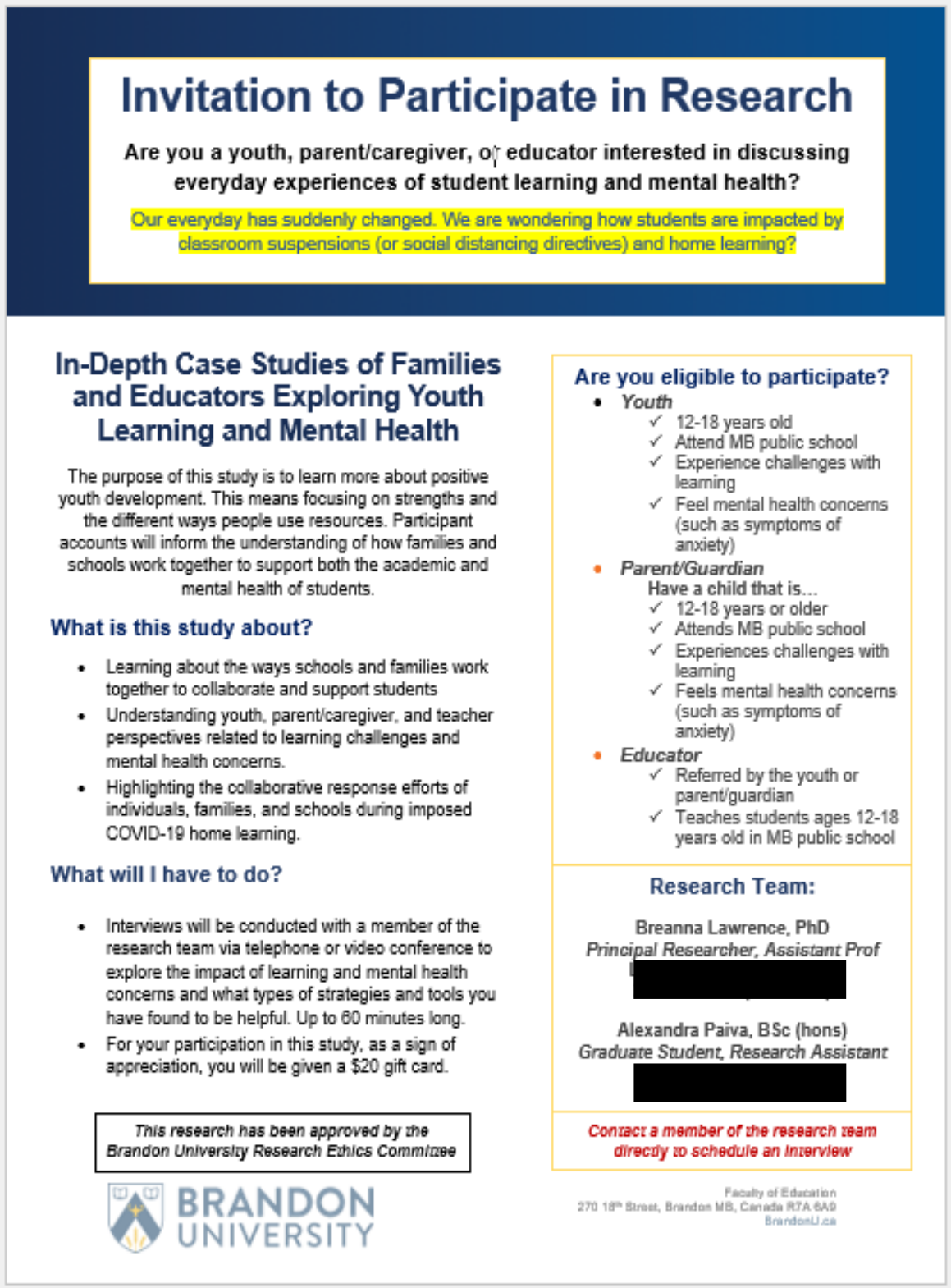
Appendix A

Recruitment Poster



Invitation to Participate in Research

Are you a youth, parent/caregiver, or educator interested in discussing everyday experiences of student learning and mental health?

Our everyday has suddenly changed. We are wondering how students are impacted by classroom suspensions (or social distancing directives) and home learning?

In-Depth Case Studies of Families and Educators Exploring Youth Learning and Mental Health

The purpose of this study is to learn more about positive youth development. This means focusing on strengths and the different ways people use resources. Participant accounts will inform the understanding of how families and schools work together to support both the academic and mental health of students.

What is this study about?

- Learning about the ways schools and families work together to collaborate and support students
- Understanding youth, parent/caregiver, and teacher perspectives related to learning challenges and mental health concerns.
- Highlighting the collaborative response efforts of individuals, families, and schools during imposed COVID-19 home learning.

What will I have to do?

- Interviews will be conducted with a member of the research team via telephone or video conference to explore the impact of learning and mental health concerns and what types of strategies and tools you have found to be helpful. Up to 60 minutes long.
- For your participation in this study, as a sign of appreciation, you will be given a $20 gift card.

This research has been approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee

BRANDON UNIVERSITY

Are you eligible to participate?

- *Youth*
  - ✓ 12-18 years old
  - ✓ Attend MB public school
  - ✓ Experience challenges with learning
  - ✓ Feel mental health concerns (such as symptoms of anxiety)
- *Parent/Guardian*
  Have a child that is…
  - ✓ 12-18 years or older
  - ✓ Attends MB public school
  - ✓ Experiences challenges with learning
  - ✓ Feels mental health concerns (such as symptoms of anxiety)
- *Educator*
  - ✓ Referred by the youth or parent/guardian
  - ✓ Teaches students ages 12-18 years old in MB public school

Research Team:

Breanna Lawrence, PhD
Principal Researcher, Assistant Prof
[redacted]

Alexandra Paiva, BSc (hons)
Graduate Student, Research Assistant
[redacted]

Contact a member of the research team directly to schedule an interview

Faculty of Education
270 18th Street, Brandon MB, Canada R7A 6A9
BrandonU.ca

Appendix B

Youth Interview Guide

Purpose of the interview – Youth will be asked to describe their daily experiences related to learning and mental health concerns. The youth will be prompted to describe the impact of learning difficulties and emotional challenges on their daily life and to speculate about the relation between learning and mental health concerns and supportive influences.

Review Demographic Questions:

1. Age? Grade? School Division? Any diagnoses? Any inclusive education services? Any mental health service?
2. Use these specific prompts: Gender, age, grade, racial/ethnic identity.
3. Location, school division.
4. Identified specific learning disability, learning support services.
5. Identified mental health concerns, counselling support services.
6. Living situation (two parent home, single parent home, split custody, etc. and siblings).

Interview Questions:

- Here is a summary of your interview from last year (interviewer will read the bullet points) and maybe share the screen. Interview summary will have been emailed too.
    - After hearing and reading your summary, what stands out for you? What has been the same for you over the past year, and what has changed?
- Overall, how do you think you were impacted by the change in school (closures and change to emergency remote instruction) from last year?
- How are you doing in school this year? What do you notice about what works well for and what is challenging for you related to learning?

- Are there different learning or mental health issues due to COVID-19 for you? Achievement, performance, motivation, stress?
- Tell me about your anxiety/stress [or experience with mental health concerns].
    - What helps your mental health [e.g., anxiety/stress/sadness] and what makes it worse?
    - How has this effected your mental health (concerns)?
    - What has been the hardest thing for you mentally and emotionally?
    - Have any of these changes been good for you mentally or emotionally?
- What have you noticed about how learning and mental health go together/effected one and other over the past year?
    - Do you think they are related or impact one and other?
    - What works well for you (what is helpful for you) to learn? What do you like?
    - What has impacted your mental health and learning the most?
- We are interested to know more about motivation and hope. What is your motivation like these days and how has it fluctuated (changed) over the past year?
    - What has hope meant to you during this time? Is hope important to you? Why?
- Tell me about how your family functions [works] together.
    - Problem solving
    - Communications
    - Roles
    - Sharing, showing, discussing, and responding to each other's feelings

- Over the past year, with COVID-19 and the public health restrictions such as physical distancing and rules about seeing people, what has been the hardest thing for your relationships with your family or friends?
    - Have any of these changes been good for your relationships with family or friends?
- When faced with a difficult problem, how do you react? (agency and pathway processes).
    - How do you get through these difficult times? What keeps you going?
- What are some of the things you do, or what personal qualities help you to be successful each day?
    - What is it about you that helps you to be successful each day?
- Prompt for examples, possible probes related to:
    - Routine, exercise, sleep, eating patterns?
    - Adaptability? (e.g., problem solving and flexibility)
    - Stress management? (stress tolerance and impulse control)
    - General mood? (e.g., optimism and happiness)
    - Interpersonal? How you interact with and talk to others. (e.g., empathy, social responsibility, relationships)
    - Intrapersonal skills? How you interact with and talk to yourself. (e.g., self-regard, self-awareness, confidence, assertiveness, independence)
- What do your teachers do, now or in the past, that you find or have found most helpful?
- Specifically, right now with the COVID-19 health pandemic, what have your schools and teachers done that you find really supportive?

    - What types of resources are you using? How would you describe the educational resources you have available to you during the pandemic?
    - How do you feel about the amount of support your school is providing during COVID-19?
- How does your school and home life work together to support you?
    - How do your parents/caregivers and teachers collaborate or communicate?
    - Would you like them to work together?
    - How do your parents/caregivers support your learning and mental health concerns? Provide an example.
- What are you planning for next, what do you look forward to and what are your hopes?

Appendix C

Parent/Guardian Guide

Purpose of the interview: Same as last year, parents/guardians will be asked to describe their perceptions of the daily experience related to learning and mental health concerns in their household and for their child. Parents will be asked to describe the impact of their child's experiences on their mental health (e.g., symptoms of anxiety or depression). Parents will also be asked to speculate about the relation between learning and mental health concerns and to describe what supportive influences they perceive have benefited their child.

Demographic Questions:

1. Child's age? Child's grade? School division? Any diagnoses (child's)? Any inclusive education services? Any mental health service?
2. Parent gender
3. Parent age
4. Parent racial/ethnic identity
5. Location
6. Parental education
7. Employment status
8. Parental marital status
9. Optional - Socioeconomic status (annual household income)

Interview questions/prompts:

- Here is a summary of your interview from last year (interviewer will read the bullet points and maybe share the screen). Interview summary will have been emailed to.

        - After hearing and reading your summary, what stands out for you? What has been the same for you over the past year, and what has changed?
    - Overall, how was your family impacted by the change in school (closures and change to emergency remote instruction) from last year? In general, how have you been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - Tell me about how your family functions [works] together over the past year. What has changed for the better, and for the worse?
        - Problem solving
        - Communications
        - Roles, e.g., prompt - does one parents or caregiver assume primary responsibility of child's learning and mental health needs?
        - Sharing, showing, discussing and responding to each other's feelings
    - What have you noticed about how the past year has affected your child's learning (challenges) and mental health concerns?
- How have learning and mental health difficulties interacted/looked this year?
- What has worked well for your child this year?
    - How do they like to learn? What supports their mental health? What types of resources are you using? How have you been involved with resources or supports/interventions aimed at learning and mental health concerns for your child?
- How have you communicated and collaborated with your child's school this year?

    - What have you found most helpful in having a relationship with your child's school?
  - How has your relationship and collaboration with your child's school changed with COVID-19?
- Do you have any ideas about how things could be made this better for other families and for children and teens?
- What has hope meant to you during this time? Is hope important to you or what do you hope for? Why?
  - What are you planning for next, what do you look forward to and what are your hopes?